Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

STUDIES IN POETS

ALFRED TENNYSON

SELECT POEMS

Dr. RAGHUKUL TILAK

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ALFRED TENNYSON

SELECT POEMS

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By the Same Author :

T.S. ELIOT :
1. The 'Waste Land' and Other Poems
2. The Critic
3. Murder in the Cathedral
4. The Cocktail-Party
5. The Family Reunion

BERNARD SHAW :
6. Man and Superman
7. Arms and the Man
8. Saint Joan
9. Candida
10. Major Barbara

GEORGE ELIOT :
11. Middlemarch
12. Mill on the Floss
13. Adam Bede

ARISTOTLE :
14. The Poetics

COLERIDGE :
15. Biographia Literaria

WORDSWORTH :
16. Preface to the Lyrical Ballads

DRYDEN :
17. An Essay of Dramatic Poesy

SIDNEY :
18. An Apology for Poetry

JOHN WEBSTER :
19. The Duchess of Malfi

VIRGINIA WOOLF :
20. To the Lighthouse
21. Mrs. Dalloway

W.M. THACKERAY :
22. Vanity Fair

JOSEPH CONRAD :
23. Lord Jim

ROBERT BROWNING :
24. Select Poems, Vol. I
25. Select Poems, Vol. II

ALFRED TENNYSON :
26. Select Poems

W.H. AUDEN :
27. Select Poems
28. Ascent of F-6

JOHN DONNE :
29. Select Poems

JOHN MILTON :
30. Minor Poems

MATTHEW ARNOLD :
31. Essays in Criticism

SHAKESPEARE :
32. Much Ado About Nothing (Text with Annotations)
33. Henry IV, Part I (Text with Annotations)
34. Henry IV, Part I (A Critical Study)
35. Richard II (Text with Annotations)
36. Richard II (A Critical Study)
37. A Midsummer Night's Dream (Study Guide Notes with objective type Questions-Answers)
38. Twelfth Night (Study Guide Notes) (do)
39. As You Like it (Study Guide Notes) (do)
40. The Merchant of Venice (Study Guide Notes) (do)

ROBERT FROST :
41. Select Poems

WALT WHITMAN :
42. Select Poems

EUGENE O'NEILL :
43. The Hairy Ape
44. Desire Under the Elms
45. The Iceman Cometh
46. The Emperor Jones

R.K. NARAYAN :
47. The Guide
48. Swami and Friends

TAGORE :
49. Gitanjali

RAJA RAO :
50. Kanthapura
51. The Serpent and the Rope

KAMALA MARKANDAYA :
52. Nectar in a Sieve

MULK RAJ ANAND :
53. Coolie
54. Untouchable

SAROJINI NAIDU :
55. Select Poems

SRI AUROBINDO :
56. Savitri, Book I and Other Poems
57. New Indian English Poets & Poetry
58. History and Principles of Literary Criticism
59. New Criticism and New Critics
60. Background to English Literature

DYLAN THOMAS :
61. Select Poems
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CARLYLE :
63. Hero as Poet

VIRGINIA WOOLF :
64. The Common Reader

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STUDIES IN POETS

ALFRED TENNYSON

SELECT POEMS

[With a Detailed Consideration of Select Poems with Their Text]

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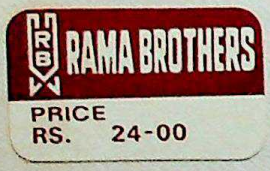

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PREFACE TO THE EIGHTH EDITION

It is a matter of great pleasure for the author to place this eighth edition of his work *Tennyson : Select Poems* in the hands of students. The need of a fresh edition, almost every year, is ample testimony of its popularity and usefulness. The book has been thoroughly revised, and every care has been taken to make it more useful for the reading community. Since the book was first published, critical works on Tennyson have kept pouring in providing new perspectives on this most representative of the Victorian poets. The author has now been able to use this critical material and make a re-assessment of the art and genius of this immortal poet.

The process of critical evaluation is a continuous one and some lapses and shortcomings are inevitable even in the most carefully written works. Suggestions for improvement are, therefore, invited and would be duly incorporated in the next edition.

In the end, I express my gratefulness to all those students, friends and sympathetic readers who have encouraged me by their appreciation and constructive suggestions.

—RAGHUKUL TILAK

Meerut
March, 1985

1. The Lady of Shalott.
2. Palace of Art
3. The Two Voices.
4. Ulysses.
5. The Vision of Sin.
6. In Memoriam

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

Tennyson is a major British poet. He might have his limitations but all the same he is an *abiding* poet, and the day will never come when he is forgotten. It is, therefore, in the fitness of things that he is now prescribed for study both at the under-graduate and post-graduate levels by most universities of the country. The book is designed to meet the needs of advanced students of English literature in India.

Various significant aspects of Tennyson's poetry have been dealt with exhaustively, and select critical material has been incorporated. The effort throughout has been to highlight some important aspects or the other of Tennyson's art. Emphasis has been on clarification and elucidation, and scholarly hair-splitting has been avoided as far as possible. The treatment is comprehensive and elaborate, but at the same time simple, lucid and easy to understand.

Besides this, a number of poems of Tennyson have been dealt with in detail. The poems selected are such as are usually prescribed for study for Honours and M.A. students. The selection is large and varied enough and gives the readers a firm and distinct impression of the important qualities of Tennyson's poetry. For the convenience of students, the Texts of these poems have also been added. It is, therefore, hoped that the book would be of some use to those for whom it is meant.

A list of questions, which have been set by the various Indian universities from time to time, has been given and textual problems have been dealt with in the light of those questions. A list of books consulted and drawn upon is appended at the end. It should serve as a guide to further reading.

I am grateful to the publishers for the keen interest they have taken, and co-operation they have extended to me, in making the book up-to date.

Meerut
1972

—RAGHUKUL TILAK

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1

The Age of Tennyson

or

The Social and Literary Background to Tennyson's Poetry

(A) SOCIAL BACKGROUND

Tennyson has been called a representative poet. He is one of those great writers who express in their works the very spirit of the age. Hence for an understanding of his poetry it is essential to form an idea of his age.

An Era of Peace and Prosperity

Tennyson lived and produced during the second half of the 19th century. It was the time during which Queen Victoria ruled over England. In the beginning of the era there was a widespread faith in unlimited progress. This sense of self-satisfaction or complacency resulted from the immense strides that England had taken in the industrial and scientific fields. The nation was prospering and growing richer and richer everyday. The British empire was already a reality, the, "white man's burden", or the colonising mission of the English was already bringing up rich dividends. They attributed all this prosperity to their glorious and dominant Queen Victoria. It was an era of prosperity, an era of aggressive nationalism, an era of rising imperialism. Hence, nobody wanted that the status quo should be disturbed; any questioning of the present order was frowned upon. Emphasis was on faith, faith in one's religion, faith in the queen and those in authority, and faith in continuous progress. If there were doubts anywhere, they needed to be compromised with the existing order.

Rapid Social Change

However, such a state of affair could not continue for long. The Industrial Revolution gradually destroyed old agricultural England. It shook the supremacy of the aristocratic class and landed

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gentry, and brought into being a new merchant class. This new class, quite naturally, clamoured for power and prestige, both political and social, and did not agree to the accepted order of things. Victorian traditions and conventions were thns subjected to greater and greater pressures and by the last quarter of the century there were large cracks in the Victorian fabric. Moreover, the lower classes, too, were acquiring increasing political rights. There was mental and cultural emancipation all around.

Rise of Democracy : Liberalism

This spirit of emancipation is nowhere seen to better advantage than in the freedom which women gradually acquired. Victorian tradition and Victorian prudery placed excessive emphasis on the chastity of women. Their proper sphere was within the four walls of the home ; any contact with the outside world was supposed to corrupt and spoil them. Their sole business was to look after the comforts of their men folk. But with the passing of time the movement for women's emancipation gained ground ; women were given political rights and more and more of them came out of their homes to take up independent careers. Florence Nightingale did valuable service to the cause of women. Problems of sex and married life were receiving increasing attention from thinkers and writers. Havellock Ellis and Freud were already working on their epock-making works. Tennyson expresses his views on the problem in his *The Princess*.

Evolutionary Science : The Spirit of Questioning

This break-up of Victorian traditions and conventions was accelerated by the rapid advance of science. Science with its emphasis on reason rather than on faith encouraged the spirit of questioning. Victorian beliefs, both religious and social, were subjected to a searching scrutiny and found wanting. The publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859 is of special significance from this point of view. His celebrated theory of Evolution contradicted the account of Man's origin as given in *the Bible*. His theory carried conviction as it was logically developed and supported by over-whelming evidence. Man's faith in orthodox religion was shaken ; he could no longer accept without question Gods mercy, etc., for such orthodox notions of God were contradicted by facts. Similarly, Darwin, with his emphasis on the brutal struggle for existence which is the law of Nature, exploded the romantic view of her as a, 'Kindly Mother' having a "Holy plan" of her own. The process started by Drawin was completed by philosophers like Huxley, Spencer, Mill, etc. The impact of these developments in science and philosophy on the literature of the period is far reaching.

Pessimism of the Age

Thus the established order, customs, faiths, beliefs and traditions were losing their hold on the minds of the people, and the new order

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of things had not yet been established. Man had lost his mooring in God, Religion and Nature. The mechanistic view of the universe precluded any faith in a benevolent creator. Man felt, "Orphan and defrauded". He took a gloomy view of life, for he felt miserable and helpless with nothing to fall back upon. It was for the first time, says **David Cecil**, that, "*conscious, considered pessimism became a force in English literature*". The melancholy poems of Arnold, the poetry of Fitzgerald, Thomson's *The City of God*, and the works of Thomas Hardy all reflect the pessimistic outlook of the late Victorian era. This growth of pessimism was further encouraged by the flow of pessimistic thought from Europe, where pessimism was much in the air at the time.

The Victorian Compromise

A word may now be said of the famous Victorian compromise. The age in which Tennyson matured and produced was an era of social change. Man was caught between two worlds, with the old one crumbling down, and the new one not yet formed. Doubts and unrest possessed man's soul and everything was in ferment. The chief disintegrating forces of the Victorian age were three (*a*) the Industrial Revolution resulting in the rise of a new, rich and prosperous, merchant class, desirous of rank and privilege, (*b*) the rise of democracy, (*c*) and the rise of evolutionary science. All these forces tended towards the breakdown of the existing order. Hence an effort was made to reconcile the old and the new, to bring about a compromise between science and religion, between the demand for 'progress' and the need of stability, order and peace.

Its Several Aspects

The Victorian compromise had several aspects. Politically it meant the reconciliation of the claims of liberty and progress with order. An orderly broadening down of freedom from precedent to precedent became the Victorian ideal. Government still remained an affair of 'great families' whether Whig or Tory. But the aristocracy itself was recruited more freely from the middle classes. In every field the Victorians tried to uphold authority in the face of the rising tide of social change. In the political field 'authority' meant State and established Law ; in the field of government it meant aristocracy ; in religion it was represented by the Established Church ; in the domestic sphere it meant the supremacy of Man over woman. Victorianism emphasised authority, and in religion it was represented by the English Church. The emphasis on Church authority deepened in the face of the challenge from science and rationalism.

Social Morality

Morality and respectability were the corner-stones of Victorianism. This emphasis on conventional morality was partly a reaction

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Victorians expected the poets not only to amuse but to instruct.

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against the corruption of the earlier age, scandals of Byron and the radicalism of Shelley who did not hesitate even from depicting incest. "Moral duty remained for most Victorians a categorical imperative." The Victorians expected the poets not only to amuse but also to instruct. Men of letters must show a sense of social responsibility in a high degree. It is reflected in the humanitarianism of Dickens, Kingsley and Charles Reade.

Extremes of language and passion discarded.

Avoidance of Extremes

The Victorians disliked extremes of feeling or passion or even language. There was a tacit understanding as to what was to be depicted on the stage and what to be left to the imagination. A general reticence concerning matters of sex is a common charcteristic of literature in the Victorian age. **H. M. Jones** remarks : *Victorianism is the pretence that if you do not name a thing it isn't there.*" According to **Elwin** "prudery and humbug" presided over the age. This prudery placed a real limitation on the contents of the novel. It made it impossible for the novelist and poets to portray a real, living woman. Hence it is that decorum and solemnity are associated with Victorianism.

2nd half of the 19th c. Certainly saw decay of the Romantic movement.

(B) LITERARY TRENDS

Abundance of Output Tennyson covered 60 years.

By the second half of the 19th century, the Romantic movement had exhausted itself, and with the reign of Queen Victoria there began a new and golden age in the literary history of England. The sixty years covered by Tennyson's working life were rich in literature of almost every kind. They were years of rapid change, stimulating thought and provoking criticism. The growth of wealth gave increased leisure for the pursuit of letters, and widened the audience to whom a man of letters could appeal. In a single year, 1855, there were published Tennyson's *Maud*, Browning's *Men and Women*, Arnold's *Balder Dead*, Patmore's *Angel in the House*, and Macdonald's first work ; in fiction, Dickens' *Little Dorrit* and Thackeray's *Newcomes*, Mrs. Gaskell's *North and South*, Kingsley's *Westward Ho* ! and Trollope's *Warden* ; in history, the third and fourth volumes of Macaulay's *History*. At the same time, there were writing such eminent writers as Rossetti and Fitzgerald, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, and George Meredith, and in the world of criticism, Ruskin, Carlyle, Mill and Newman. It was the golden age of literature.

Literature and Social Criticism

As a whole, the literature of the period is critical of the age rather than representative of it. The popular philosophy of the time was Utilitarianism. It was the philosophy of a commercial people.

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utalitarianism : Chief aim material Progress

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whose chief aim and achievement was material progress. Utilitarianism appears in the imaginative literature of the time only to be criticised and vilified. Everywhere, in the poetry of Tennyson and Arnold, in the novels of Dickens and Thackeray, in the art criticism of Ruskin and the literary criticism of Carlyle, we get the same note of social criticism, the same dissatisfaction with contemporary ideals. "Complacency and optimism are the keynotes of the Victorian Age in everything but its literature ; mental struggle and spiritual dissatisfaction are the keynotes of its literature."

Literature, Science and Religion (Literature Came to the aid of Religion

Literature came to the aid of religion in upholding high ideals against the rising materialism of the age. It had also to aid religion in its more special work of upholding an idealistic view of the universe. "A scientific method was being developed which made the investigation of nature effective to an extent hitherto undreamed of ; and man's conception of the material universe was changed. By Darwin's application of the law of evolution to biology man's conception of himself was changed as greatly. The critical method of the natural sciences was extended to history and theology, and the fabric of authority found itself undermined on very side", (**Watt and Clay**). Old views of the universe, of man and his relation to God, had to be given up or resisted. The orthodox hesitated, or tried to ignore the criticism ; but the thoughtful layman felt his old beliefs giving way, and naturally turned to the sciences. Rationalistic theories eliminated the supernatural from the universe, and, perhaps unintentionally, gave some support to the materialism of the age. Those whose honesty compelled them to give up traditional faiths—at any rate in the form in which they had received them—and who could not find any permanent satisfacion in a purely material conception of life, took refuge in indifference to religion. Carlyle, the first great figure of the period, is typical of its literature, because he preached the necessity of faith, and, though he was unable to reach such faith himself, proclaimed the insufficiency of existing social ideals. Tennyson's work is full of the struggle between knowledge and faith. "Clough and Arnold represent it, the one tempering agnosticism with hope, the other with stoicism. In fiction, until we reach George Eliot, there is little evidence of the intellectual changes of the time ; but in all of it there is abundant criticism of the social tendencies and ideals" (**Watt and Clay**).

Interest in the Past (Tennyson, Arnold, Swinburne)

Dissatisfaction with their own age combined with the romantic impulse of curiosity to turn men's interests to past ages. "*As in most literary revivals the classical myths received a new life ; and in the hands of (Tennyson, Arnold, and Swinburne were made to express the thought and feelings of the modern world.*") Arnold lived in habitual converse with the Greeks and derived his art and ideas from

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them rather than from any modern source. Browning made the period of the Renaissance living and real. Pater found much that could be applied to modern conditions in the life of the second century of the Christian era. But the chief historical interest of the time was in the Middle Ages, and the chief expression of this interest was, perhaps, the Oxford Movement.

Poetry, Chiefly Lyrical

The poetry of a period generally reflects the main characteristics of its intellectual life ; but it may be doubted whether the Victorian poetry does so. Historically perhaps prose fiction is the most important, or at any rate the most characteristic, product of the literature of that century. "*Poetry during the period is chiefly lyric or episodic in character*". There are few great constructive works. Browning is an exception ; but even his plays are the least successful part of his work. Morris was a great narrative poet, but his narrative was not dramatic ; and Tennyson's plays and *Idylls of the King* are the part of his work with which the majority of people would most willingly dispense. "The best poetical work of the age was done in the realisation of separate characters, single episodes, isolated emotions. We rarely find successful poems the chief interest of which lies in the interrelations of a number of characters and the interplay of their emotions. For this kind of work we must go to the novel" **(Watt and Clay)**.

The Novel : Its Representative Character

The novel is perhaps the most elastic and adaptable form that the literary artist has discovered. The eighteenth century had invented it, but its possibilities, so far from being exhausted by the eighteenth century writers, were barely explored by them. Scott, with enormous success, made the novel a vehicle of the Romantic spirit. Jane Austen showed its possibilities in the way of the quietest realism. And the Victorian novelists followed her example in treating contemporary life and manners. While allowing the author to elaborate characters and incidents in detail, the novel requires elaborate dramatic construction. It gives the humorist his opportunity, whether his humour lies mainly in the perception and creation of oddities of character, as with Dickens, or in his style, as with Thackeray. The variety of treatment it permits gives the writer scope for fullest self-expression ; and the variety of subject it can treat is so great that the works of, for example, Dickens and Thackeray give us a more complete picture of the London of their time than we could have got in any other way. The Victorian novel gives us a panoramic view of the life of the times ; it is a social document of great value and significance.

The Collapse of Drama

The only rival of the novel is the drama ; and for some reason or other the Victorian age was singularly poor in this branch of

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Death of drama and Revival of novel: Novel could command much larger audience than drama.

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literature. "It may have been that drama requires the concentration of the intellectual life of a nation in one place, as the life of France is now concentrated in Paris, or as that of England was in London in the times of Shakespeare, Congreve and Sheridan. It may simply have been that the people with dramatic genius did not think of the stage because the novel could command a much larger audience with much less trouble. Whatever the cause, however, the drama plays but a small part in the literature of the period." A number of poets wrote poetical dramas which had literary value, but were unsuited for the stage. Tennyson's plays were acted, but have not kept the stage. The same is true of Browning's plays; though their dramatic value is higher than those of Tennyson's, and, in **Mr. Birrell's** words, they 'entitle the author to the very first place amongst those dramatists of the century who have laboured under the enormous disadvantage of being poets to start with.' Of the commercially successful dramatists of the age, Bulwer Lytton and Charles Reade have a place in literature, but as novelists rather than as dramatists. The revival of drama came only with the last few years of the century. (Revival of drama came only with the last few years of the century).

Lack of High Literary Ideals

The wide appeal of prose fiction is significant of an important tendency. With the growth of population and the diffusion of education, a great reading public grew up unlike any that had existed before. This new reading public has no high literary standards. It has asked for something to read, and two great industries have grown up to satisfy that demand through popular fiction and popular journalism. Hence it has become difficult for an author always to satisfy his standards of literary taste and at the same time to make a popular appeal. Dickens succeeded, but others have not been so fortunate, and hence we have the new and strange condition of a great class of readers who have no interest in the true literature of the time.

Popular fiction
Popular journal

Great mass of magazines and serial publications:

Journalism : Serial Publications

To reach this class there has grown up a great mass of magazines and other serial publications which, with much that is purely ephemeral, contain a good deal of real literature. "At the same time, thanks to education, the proportion of the nation with a genuine interest in literature is increasing; and the effect of this popular demand on literary development is one of the most interesting studies in contemporary criticism."

1. Arnold conversed with the Greeks and derived his art and ideas from them than from any modern source.
2. Browning made the period of Renaissance living and real
3. Pater found much that could be applied to modern conditions of life and the second century of the Christian era.

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Boston August 6, 1809
Lincolnshire —
Painted its inland scenery in
'The may Queen' Coastline in
'Locksley Hall'

2

Life and Career of Lord Alfred Tennyson

Birth and Parentage

Tennyson was born on August 6, 1809, in Lincolnshire, the county of which he has painted the inland scenery in *The May Queen* and the coastland in *Locksley Hall*. His father was Rector of Somersby, a tiny village between Spilsby and Horncastle, set among orchards and deep lanes and large spreading fields that carry the eye upward to the gray hills around.

Early Boyhood

Read Thompson, Scot, Pope and Byron.

It was here that he spent all his early life, playing by the river side, reading voluminously, thrilling his brothers and sisters with stories of romance, and writing, as surely no child ever wrote before. "Of course, the style was copied from the poet who happened to be his hero at the moment, Thomson at eight, Pope at eleven; then, at twelve, an epic of six thousand lines in imitation of Scott; then, at fourteen, a blankverse drama modelled on Byron; but, apart from this extraordinary facility, the technical skill of these boyish works satisfied even the exacting taste of his later life. 'I have some of them still by me'; he said in 1890, 'and they seem to me in perfect metre'."

Education at Cambridge

From 1817 to 1820 he was at school at Louth. On his return, he worked for eight years with his father, a classical scholar of considerable learning and great poetic attainments, and in 1828 he entered, with his brother Charles, at Trinity College, Cambridge. His University career was remarkable, not so much from his winning the Prize for his Poem *Timbuctoo*—the last reward and almost the last topic which we should readily associate with his name—as for the number and value of the friendships which he formed. He was intimate with such eminent figures as Spedding, Milnes, Trench, Brookfield, Alford, Arthur Hallam, Merivale; these were some of the men who filled his rooms. It was no small thing to take the lead of such a society, and to hold it with simple unaffected singleness of

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won Prize for his 'Timbuctoo' at Cambridge. -

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heart. "Then as always his modesty shrank from every form of public display, and even when he gained his academic honour he asked Merivale to recite at the Senate house the poem which he was too shy to deliver in person".

Early Poetry (with his brother Charles 'Poems by two brothers')

It was at Cambridge that he first began to speak in poetry with his own voice. Before going up he had published, conjointly with Charles Tennyson, a volume entitled *Poems by Two Brothers*, but these are mere echoes of his Byron-worship. The volume of 1830 brings out of its treasure house things new as well as old. The songs, the love-poems, are still of little account, but in *Mariana*, in the *Ode to Memory*, and in *Recollections of the Arabian Nights*, he already indicates his power of pictorial description ; in *The Poet* he gives a noble confession of the faith from which he never afterwards departed, and on every page he sounds a note, faint but unmistakable, of the matchless melody which sings in all his later verse.

Bereavements (Reform Bill of 1832) 1831 - Father's death 1833 - Arthur Hallam

In 1841 he left Cambridge, and in 1832 came the year of Reform, big with graver issues than England had known since the Napoleonic wars. There can be no doubt that Tennyson was profoundly affected by the awakening spirit of the time, and especially by a distrust of that growing individualism which the extremists then upheld as an ideal. "The more serious tone which overpread his life was further deepened by personal bereavement. His father's death in 1831 was followed in 1833 by that of Arthur Hallam, the dearest and most intimate of his friends : there is little wonder that, amid private sorrow and public concern, his poetry should strike a note more earnest and more pathetic" (**Hadow**).

Volumes of 1833 and 1842

The next volumes of poetry appeared in 1833 and 1842 respectively. The two volumes display a certain similarity of topic and treatment, and the later volume contains revised versions of a number of poems printed in the earlier volume. Among similarities we have first the classical poems—*Oenone* and *The Lotos-eaters* in the one, *Ulysses* in the other ; second, the English idyllic poems—*The May Queen* and *The Miller's Daughter* balanced by *Dora*, *The Gardener's Daughter*, and *Audley Court* : and third, the symbolic poems, in which Tennyson first employed his eloquence for the direct inculcation of moral truth ; as in *The Palace of Art* (1833) and *The Vision of Sin* (1842).

Recognition : the Circle of Friends

In 1845 Tennyson received his first official recognition—a pension, from the civil list, of £200 a year. It is said that Sir Robert Peel, who was then Premier, hesitated between the poet and Sheridan Knowles, of neither of whom had he ever read a line, and that his decision was determined by Monckton Milnes, afterwards Lord

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Houghton, who converted him with a copy of *Ulysses*. It is also said that Lord Houghton was stimulated to this missionary effort by Carlyle, who, ever since the volume of 1842, had become one of Tennyson's warmest and most cordial admirers. "The two had little in common beyond their vivid imagination and their uncompromising love of truth ; they differed almost as widely in opinion as they differed in style ; but their grounds of resemblance were enough for a deep-based mutual respect, and for an intimacy which lasted through life." Among Tennyson's other friends of this time may be mentioned Rogers, Audrey de Vere, Dickens, Thackeray, the Brownings, and above all FitzGerald, a comrade for whose work he had a high regard, and to whose suggestions and criticisms he attached great value. Queen Victoria said, "In Memoriam is my Comfort, Next to the Bible".

'The Princess' and 'In Memoriam'

His next two poems represent the two poles of his genius : *The Princess* (1847), with its homely setting, its gay romance, and its admirable songs : *In Memoriam* (1850), sweetest of English elegies, at the composition of which he had laboured for nearly seventeen years. "Nowhere has he more openly unlocked his heart, nowhere has he shown us more of his inner life, of his thought on the great problems of humanity, love and sorrow, faith and doubt, regret and resignation. Critics have found it cold ; the verse, they say, is too carefully polished, the feeling too carefully repressed ; but to urge this is to misunderstand at once the reticence of the English temper and the essentially meditative and retrospective character of the poem itself. It was not, like *Adonais*, a cry of pain uttered while the wound was yet fresh ; it penetrates with long and earnest reflection to mystery of death and of the companionship which not even death can sever" (**Hadow**). It is the poetry of consolation. "*Next to the Bible*", said the Queen in her widowhood, "*In Memoriam is my comfort*".

Marriage : Laureateship

The same year added two events to the quiet record of his life. In June he was married to Miss Sellwood ; in November he accepted the Laureateship, recently vacated by the death of Wordsworth. The first fruits of his new office were the stately dedication to the Queen, written in 1851, and the *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*, which followed in the next year. In 1855 he published *Maud*, at the time the most severely criticised of all his writings ; and shortly afterwards began that series of epic romances in which he has retold the stories of the Arthurian cycle.

Idylls of the King

The subject was one which had long interested him, and in the treatment of which he had already made some preliminary essays. *The Lady of Shalott* was published in 1833 ; in 1842 followed two more Arthurian lyrics, *Sir Lancelot and Sir Galahad*, and the blank-verse poem on the *Morte d' Arthur*. Now he took up the tale again, and between 1856 and 1859 wrote the four Idylls which centre

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round the figures of *Enid*, *Vivien*, *Elaine*, and *Guinevere*. Ten years later he returned again to his theme ; in 1870 he published *The Coming of Arthur*, *The Holy Grail*, *Pelleas and Ettarre*, and *The Passing of Arthur* ; in 1872 he added *Gareth and Lynette*, and *The Last Tournament* ; in 1875 he completed the series by writing *Balin and Balan*, which, however, remained until 1885 in manuscript. The only volume which appeared during the interval was that containing *Enoch Arden* (written in 1862, published 1864), a story in which, for once, he is genius declines to a lower level.

Failure as a Dramatist

Early in the seventies he turned his attention to the stage, and wrote, in close succession, his trilogy of historical drama, *Queen Mary* (1875), *Harold* (1876) and *Becket* (1879), following them, by way of afterpiece, with a little romantic comedy, *The Falcon*, on a story taken from Boccaccio. But in entering the theatre he overstepped his natural bounds. He had little knowledge of stagecraft, little sympathy with the give-and-take of dramatic construction, and his style was too perfect for the stage. In spite of their abundant beauties neither these dramas nor those which succeeded them—*The Cup*, 1880, *The Promise of May*, 1882, *The Foresters*, 1892—gained any real hold of their audience, and not one of them has maintained the position which has so often been won by plays of far inferior genius.

Poetry of the Last Year

However, during these very years he gave ample proof that his gifts were still unimpaired. In 1880 came the magnificent volume of *Ballads and Poems* (containing, among others, *Rizpah*, *The Revenge*, *Lucknow*, and *The Voyage of Maeldune*); in 1885, 1889 and 1892 the three collections which bear the names respectively of *Tiresias*, *Demeter*, and *The Death of Œnone*. There was no lack of power in the hand which, for all its eighty years, could write *St. Telemachus* and *Akhbar's Dream*, the *Ode to Virgil*, and the deep serene melody of *Crossing the Bar*.

Last Years and Death

In 1873 he refused a Baronetcy, in 1883 he accepted a Peerage; but neither the offer refused nor the offer accepted did more than stir a ripple upon the surface of his life. His days were spent, with brief intervals of travel, in his home at Farringford : brightened by the visits of friends, disturbed by the persistent intrusion of sight seers, but standing aloof in almost unbroken tranquality from the great course and current of the world. "Though he followed the political movement with interest, he took little or no part in national events ; it was through his art that he spoke when any rare occasion stirred him to public utterance ; the occasion over, it was to his art that he returned" (**Hadow**). So the day wore on to evening, the shadows lengthened and faded, and on Oct. 6, 1892, the old poet breathed his last.

Born 6 · 8 · 1809
Death : 6 · 10 · 1892

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Charm of his poetry is the charm of his personality -

3

Tennyson The Man : His Ideals And Beliefs

The Charm of His Personality

Tennyson is one of the most popular of English poets, and the charm of his poetry, is the charm of the poet's personality. At the base of all Tennyson's teachings, indeed of all his works, is Tennyson the man. A poet's poetry is cast in the mould of his thoughts, and for a proper understanding of his works it is essential to understand his ideals and beliefs, the views and opinions, which inspired him in life, and which determine the tone of his poetry.

The Morbid Strain

A strain of morbid melancholy ran in the family, Tennyson himself had this melancholy, and it accounts for much of his strength and weakness as a poet. "It explains the strange querulousness that marks many of his poems dealing with religious subjects ; it explains the constant harping on theological difficulties, the pessimistic note that, the first *Locksley Hall* notwithstanding, rings through most of his social utterances ; it explains also the very large proportion of poems expressing ever varying shades of wistful meditation and regret."

His Elemental Vigour

Alongwith this strain of melancholy was a strain of elemental vigour, inherent also in the rural stock from which he sprang. This characteristic, though familiar enough to Tennyson's friends, is less discrenible in his writings, since he has not given it full expression in his poetry. But unless we remember it we shall not find it easy to understand how the man who wrote the sentimental Idylls, and chiselled with such laborious art and severe restraint the verse of *In Memoriam*, wrote also *The Northern Farmer, The Cobbler*, and *Rizpah*.

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Physical Appearance and Manners

No better alround picture of Tennyson has ever been drawn than by Carlyle, whose genius for literary portrait painting, despite humorous exaggerations, was unsurpassed. "A man solitary and sad, as certain men are, dwelling in an element of gloom, carrying a bit of Chaos about him, which he is manufacturing into Cosmos. One of the finest looking men in the world—a great shock of rough, dusky dark hair ; bright, laughing, hazel eyes ; massive aquiline face, most massive yet most delicate ; of sallow, brown-complexion, almost Indian looking ; clothes cynically loose, free-and-easy, smokes infinite tobacco. His voice is musical, metallic, fit for loud laughter and piercing wail, and all that may lie between speech and speculation, free and plenteous ; I do not meet in these late decades such company over a pipe ! We shall see what he shall grow to." Again, to his brother John, Carlyle sent the following account of Tennyson : "A fine, large-featured, dim-eyed. bronze-coloured, shaggy-headed man is Alfred ; dusky, smoky, free-and-easy : who swims outwardly and inwardly, with great composure, in an articulate element as of tranquil chaos and tobacco smoke ; great now and then when he does emerge ; a most restful, brotherly, solid hearted man,"

His Passion for Law and Order

Tennyson the man had a keen perception of the necessity of law and order governing human action, and this perception of Law is one of the main currents of thought that runs through all his writing. The entire body of his poetry is pervaded by a sense of Law controlling the worlds of sense and spirit ; everywhere he recognises a settled scheme of great purposes underlying a universal order and gradually developing to completion. Both in his treatment of nature and human action, we find the same guiding and controlling principle of law. In *In Memoriam* he writes,

I curse not nature, no, nor death ;
For nothing is that errs from law.

In all the workings of nature, he traces the evolution of the great designs of God,

That God, which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element,
And one far off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves.

Allied to this belief in divine law, was his sympathy with disciplined order in the various spheres of human action. His ideal of freedom, for instance, is that freedom which has been evolved by the gradual growth of English institutions, that freedom which, "*slowly broadens down from precedent to precedent.*"

He did not like sudden revolutions or bloody changes. He believed in disciplined action and self-control. In his conception of

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True love can only exist under the Sanction of Duty

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love, and in his portraiture of womanhood, we find the same spirit of law and discipline. "His highest ideal of love is the pure passion of wedded life; true love can exist only under the sanction of Duty".

His Nobility

A second great element of Tennyson's character is its noble tone. This is present in every poem he has ever written. His verse is informed with the very spirit of *Honour*, of *Duty*, and of *Reverence* for all that is pure and true. This is the spirit that animates the famous passage in *Œnone*.

Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
These three alone lead life to sovereign power.

It is illustrated on its negative side in *The Palace of Art*; it breathes through his noble *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*, and it pervades and inspires his picture of King Arthur in *the Idylls of the King*. Tennyson's religious faith is sufficiently indicated in his writings. At the root of his poetry, **as S. A. Brooke** has remarked, lie, "the ever-working immanence of God in man, the brotherhood of the human race, and its evolution into perfect love and righteousness; the continuance of each man's personal consciousness in the life to be; and the vitality of the present."

His Simplicity Simple habits and manners

Another main characteristic of Tennyson is simplicity. He was a man of simple habits and simple manners. His way of life was simple. The emotions that he appeals to are generally easy to understand and common to all. He avoids the subtle analysis of character, and the painting of complex motives or of the wild excesses of passion. The moral laws which he so strongly upholds are those primary sanctions upon which average English society is founded. A certain Puritan simplicity and a scholarly restraint pervade the mass of his work.

Conclusion

It is on these foundations of Order, Nobility and Simplicity that Tennyson's character and his works are built.

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4

Works of Tennyson

Or

The Evolution of His Genius

His Poetic Output : Its Abundance

Tennyson began creating at the early age of seventeen and continued to write upto the very end of his days. His creative span covers a period of more than fifty years. He is a voluminous poet and it is not possible to deal with all his works in the limited space at our disposal. We give below a brief account of a few of his more important works, works with which students should have at least a passing acquintance.

Early Poems

Tennyson's first volume of poems entitled *Poems by Two Brothers* was published in 1827. It was followed by another volume of poems, *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical,* in 1830. These early volumes are immature. They suffer from thinness of inspiration, and there is too much of sugar. However, even these early poems show signs of promise. They are the works of a talented, but immature school boy.

Poems, 1842 : Maturity

His next volume of poems, which is often designated as *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical, 1832,* shows a steady advance in his poetic art. Here are to be found such notable poems as *The Lady of Shallot, Œnone, The Lotos-Eaters,* and *The Palace of Art,* wherein we see the Tennysonian technique moving steadily towards perfection. After a silence of ten years, in 1842, Tennyson produced another volume of poetry that set him once and for all among the greater poets of the age. These two volumes, 'placed Tennyson on that summit from which he was never dislodged'. *Morte'd Arthur, Ulysses, Locksley Hall,*

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and several other poems are the beautiful gems of these two volumes. They exhibit the poet's increasing command over music and expression and the finer niceties of poetic style.

The Princess : Its Songs

The Princess, a Medley, a poem on the education of women, was published in 1847. Here his lyric note is ampler and more varied. The story, though charming, illustrates the inability of women to compete with men in the field of intetllect—an unenlightened view which has been thoroughly disproved in the twentieth century. This work is perhaps the first in which Tennyson exhibits his chief shortcoming : his thinking is essentially on a mediocre plane. It is only as an artist that Tennyson is superb, and that portion of his poetry in which he did not set himself up as a thinker is the portion (and that is large) which is bound to survive. Characteristically, it is not the bulk of *The Princess* which is read any longer, but seven songs which have been introduced in the main story. These songs, indeed, are among the most amazing of the lyrics in the English Language. *Sweet and Love,* is a wonderful lullaby. *The Splendour Falls* is a brilliant bugle-song. The third song, *Tears, Idle Tears,* is a wonderful achievement, a song without rhyme. It will strike a chord in every human heart. Such tears are fresh, sad, and strange, and as dear as "remembered kisses after death," and deep as first love, "and wild with all regret" ; they are a death in life. The fourth song, *Home They Brought Her Warrior Dead,* is a rather sentimental narrative. The widow cannot weep at the sight of her dead husband, and if she does not weep she will die ; at last his child is placed upon her knee, and then, "like summer tempest came her tears." The fifth song, *Ask Me No More,* is the song of the woman in love to the man she loves. The sixth song, *Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal,* is another song of love. The last song, *Come Down, O Maid, From Yonder Mountain Height,* is a love song, full of beautiful descriptions of English countryside.

In Memoriam

Three years later in 1850 Tennyson published his momentous elegy *In Memoriam. In Memoriam* (1850) is a high watermark in Tennyson's poetic production. It is a splendid tribute to friendship, having been written over a period of years, commemorating a friend who had died in 1833. The theme of this long poem is the immortality of the soul In reality, it is a series of 131 short poems, held together loosely by the central theme. The poet attempts to reconcile a world of fact and reality with a world of hope and dreams. He begins in sorrow and bewilderment before the mystery of death and the meaning of life, passes through various stages of doubts and despair, and ends with a conviction that faith is man's answer to the eternal questions.

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In Memoriam has been criticised for its looseness of construction and its lack of dramatic sense, but it shows a remarkable depth of feeling and quietly develops a poetic philosophy of consolation. Tennyson's life was noble and his mind was ever filled with lofty thought. He was simple, direct and unsophisticated in the expression of his ideals. He was, above all, sincere. All this is reflected in this collection of wonderful lyrics.

In Memoriam was immediately popular, for it contained something that appealed to all ; to the man of science who was pleased to find himself understood ; to the man oppressed with doubts who found many of his own difficulties powerfully and beautifully expressed by the poet, and to the orthodox believer who was gratified by the final victory of faith. *"In helping to break down the opposition between science and spiritual faith, 'In Memoriam' did a great service to the age."*

Maud

In the same year as saw the publication of *In Memoriam*, the poets wrote his great *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington.* As a poet of domestic politics he was never inspiring, but as a writer of patriotic verse, he is among the most distinguished of our poets, and this poem is among the best of its kind. Then a few years later, in 1855, came *Maud, a Monodrama.* As an organic whole, *Maud* is even less satisfactory than *The Princess*, and is decidedly inferior to *Memoriam.* The neurotic hero is so morbid and hysterical from the outset that his final lapse into madness fails to affect the reader with the dramatic intensity that was needed. A noble mind o'erthrown, is matter for the greatest poetry ; but it is impossible to feel any thrill from the disaster to so poor a creature as Tennyson has given us.

Looked at not as the study of a diseased soul, but as a collection of fragmentary lyrics, our feelings are very different. In lyric splendour, Tennyson had never done and never did finer work. "As a love poem, *Maud* is a triumph, not merely for the satisfying beauty of its phrasing, but as a glorious expression of the sheer ecstasy and rapture of passion". When reading such lyrics as the garden invocation, or the even lovelier, *"O that 'twere possible after long grief and pain,"* we are ready to forget the confused and patchy treatment of the psychological connecting links, and the hysterical eulogy of war with which the Monodrama starts.

The Idylls of the King

Following *Maud,* came the *Idylls of the King, 1859.* Here Tennyson treated of the Arthurian Legend, in four episodes—the Welsh story of Geraint and Enid, the tale of Merlin and Vivien, one of Lancelot's adventures, and the parting of Arthur and Guenevere. Gradually the other stories were added until the Arthurian story had

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grown into twelve books. Tennyson's interest in the old medieval cycle dated from the thirties. *The Lady of Shalott* testifies to that ; while in *The Passing of Arthur* he struck a stronger and more vibrant note than he succeeds in doing with any of the subsequent *Idylls*. Tennyson's reshaping and modernising of the legends were started in 1859 and concluded in 1885. "Technically, *the Idylls* are a great achievement. Tennyson's blank verse is inexpressibly finer in quality than any attempted by the poets of the Romantic Revival and to rival it one must go back to Milton. Previous to these Arthurian stories he had made various essays into blank verse with notable results—*e.g.*, *Ulysses*, *Lucretius*, *Aylmer's Field*—but he had never tried it on so large a scale as in *the Idylls* ; and if he cannot match the majestic organ notes of Milton, his verse has a grace, a flexibility, a noble cadence, and what is peculiarly Tennyson's, a delicate and caressing tenderness."

The English Idylls

The English Idylls is another collection of poems, in which Tennyson brought together poems which he had started writing as early as 1842. In these poems, the poet gives us glimpses of widely different types of English life. The most popular poem in this collection, published for the first time in 1864, is *Enoch Arden*. It is a simple story of a seafaring man's sorrows, not aspiring to the dimensions of the pompous march of the strain which sings of heroes and their exploits, but charming the heart by its true pathos, and the ear by a sweet music of its own. If fulfils all the conditions of the modern idyl which, depicts the joys and sorrows of humble life, describes those beauties of nature which, unperceived, enhance the former and soothe the latter, and, most important of all, is brief and compact.

Enoch Arden

Enoch Arden may be classed as among the best of the poet's works. Taking all its merits into consideration, probably no other of his poems can reach above it. It has length enough to show sustained effort ; the story is dramatic, and told with a simple and complete effect ; and the parts are, first of all, in perfect subordination to the whole and to one another ; secondly, are beautiful in themselves. The poem is remarkable for the uniform beauty of thought and expression that marks it throughout. Dealing, as it often does, with commonplace events and topics, it invests them with a loveliness and a pathos which reveals the highest taste and the truest art. At the same time the poet preserves the strictest fidelity to nature, both in the scenes that he depicts and in the feelings and emotions that he ascribes to his characters. "*We have here a simplicity that is at times almost severe, combined with the utmost clearness of diction and the richest melody of versification.*"

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'The Ballads' and 'Demeter'

The English Idylls was followed by *The Ballads*, 1880, and *Demeter*, 1889. These later volumes contain some of his finest poems. *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After* and *the Death of Œnone* are some of the finest poems echoing the sumptuous imaginings of the years preceding 1842.

Dramatic Works

Tennyson's dramatic works are not of great significance. He wrote three historical plays—*Queen Mary*, 1875, *Harold*, 1876, and *Becket*, 1884. In these plays he sought to dramatise the national history of England. They are not successful. "None, however, rank high as real dramatic efforts, though they show much care and skill." *The Falcon*, 1879, is a comedy based on a story from Boccacio. *The Cup*, 1881, owes its inspiration to Plutarch, and *The Foresters* is a dramatisation of the old Robin Hood theme.

Conclusion : His Immense Variety

This brief survey of the works of Tennyson makes it clear that the poet tried his hand at every genre of poetry, and that his art underwent a steady evolution. Everywhere his style in poetry is marked with an exquisite finish, and a flawlessness of technique which no labour could improve. *"In the wonderful variety of his verse he suggests all the qualities of England's greatest poets. The dreaminess of Spenser, the majesty of Milton, the natural simplicity of Wordsworth, the fantasy of Blake and Coleridge, the melody of Keats and Shelley, the narrative vigour of Scott and Byron, all these striking qualities are evident on successive pages of Tennyson's poetry. The only thing lacking is the dramatic power of the Elizabethans."* **(Compton-Rickett)**

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5

Tennyson and Browning : A Comparative Study

Their Gigantic Stature

Browning and Tennyson are the two giants of the Victorian era. Both, roughly speaking, began creating at the same time and both towered head and shoulders above their contemporaries from 1830 to 1890, practically the entire period of the reign of Queen Victoria. The formative years of their lives were passed in the very beginning of the new era, and the impulses they received at the beginning of their career continued to inspire them all through. While the poetic methods and ideals altered around them, they remained curiously uneffected by it. The changes we notice in their work result from the natural growth of their artistic powers, and from the decay of their powers with increasing age.

The Greater Aloofness of Browning

Their themes, their artistic methods, their view of God, man and his life, did not alter with the alteration in the views of their contemporaries. But Browning remained much more aloof from his age than did Tennyson. As is clear from the *Maud* and *The Princess*, Tennyson was influenced by the political and social events of these years. The new movements of science and criticism troubled Tennyson as they did most of his contemporaries, like Arnold and Clough. Doubt and scepticism often overtook him, though he succeeded in shaking it off. His age is reflected in his poetry, but Robert Browning's poetry shows no awareness of contemporary social changes and trends which revolutionised both theology and religion. His *Paracelsus*, 1835, and *Asolando*, 1890, strike very much the same chords.

Their Public Fates

As a matter of fact there cannot be two characters, two minds, and two poets more different from each other than were Tennyson

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and Browning. Their public fate was singularly different. Tennyson was immediately popular with the publication of his *Collected Poems*, in 1842, and his popularity continued to increase, till with the publication of *In Memoriam*, in 1850, he came to be regarded as the greatest poet of his time, and his poetry was read over the greater part of the English speaking world. His success and fame endured, and, he had a host of imitators. Browning's popularity, on the other hand, was delayed, and when it came, was limited only to a few, cultured readers. He had few imitators and followers. Even such great collection of poems as *Bells and Pomegranates*, a rare combination of music, of poetic pleasures, and of serious thought, failed to win over the public. *In Memoriam* and the collected edition of Browning's poems were published together, but their respective fates were entirely different. Browning continued to create, but to the end his poetry could receive only a limited appreciation. His recognition and popularity came but they came only as late as 1870, twenty years after the publication of his Collected Poems in 1850. This means that Tennyson had fifty years of recognition and Browning only ten Their respective public fates were entirely different. Browning's delayed popularity is even more surprizing, if we remember that his interests were catholic and cosmopolitan and that he renders in his poetry all types and phases of human nature, taken from different countries aud climes. The range of his subjects is far greater than that of Tennyson ; and his artistic methods, too, are more varied.

Tennyson's Simplicity

Browning represents in his poetry the extraordinary complexity of human life, thought and emotion. Tennyson's smooth, melodious, simple development of his themes does not represent this clashing complexity of human life and nature. He is conscious of complexity and discord, but he tries to explain it rather than render it. Moreover, Tennyson even when conscious of discord, does nothing to resolve that discord. In the poetry of Browning alone, the discords and complexities are resolved into a full harmony of thought and emotion. There is a core of peace and quiet in his poetry. He is a poet who held out hopes of peace and harmony for the human soul, both for the individual and the race. This hope is the deepest element in Browning's religion. Tennyson, too, has this hope, but he is often uncertain and he often bewails this uncertainty.

Scepticism of Tennyson Contrasted with the Certain Faith of Browning

While Browning had clear cut views of Man, Nature and God, and held firmly to them throughout his long career, Tennyson had no clear theory of man, or God, or nature. Browning's views were formed when he was young, and he did not change his views, like his contemporaries, upto the very end. He does not reflect from year to

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year the changing views of his time on these subjects. In this respect he differs sharply from Tennyson. His views are original, at least in the form in which he has expressed them. Tennyson was always assailed by spiritual doubts and conflicts. Browning was always at peace, and firmly fixed in his views. The result was that while Tennyson could fully represent his age in all its doubts and scepticism, and so could impart greater variety to his works, Browning could not do so. But while Tennyson could not give to his age faith in God and humanity, the faith in a still centre, 'in the depths of the surface storms', we get such faith, and the consequent hope, in the poetry of Browning. He, alone of all his contemporaries, brings the message of hope, and the balm of consolation, for a faithless, trouble-tormented, and pessimistic humanity.

Tennyson's Comparative Lack of Variety and Freshness

The unique feature of Browning's poetry is a rare combination of unity with diversity. The unity arises from his philosophy, from his religious theories, which are always the same. But despite this sameness of his views, there is no monotony in his poetry, for there is also the immense variety of the subjects he chooses, and the scenery in which he places them. Tennyson lacks this variety of setting and theme Browning's subjects are taken from all ages of history, from all phases of human action, character, and passion, from all countries and classes of society, and from many periods of the fine arts. His themes are as many as his poems. Moreover, he had a youthful freshness which never deserted him ; impulsive as a child, he was always moved to poetry by the sudden, fleeting impressions that came to him from passing events or scenes. The transient scenes and sights of day touched him to poetry, but not Tennyson. This again imparts variety to his poetry, and saves him from dullness or monotony, despite the sameness of his ground thought. His philosophy imparts unity to the large bulk of his poetry, and yet he avoids monotony. *"This also differentiates him from Tennyson, who often wanted freshness ; who very rarely wrote on a sudden impulse, but only after long and careful thought"* **(S. A. Brooke)**.

Deficiency in the Sense of the Past

Browning had a remarkable sense of the past, the historical sense. He could combine accuracy of knowledge with imaginative treatment. He gives us accurate and vivid pictures of human life and passions placed in a remote setting and age, and governed by the circumstances of that age. Thus his *Sordello* is the history of a soul, with all its scenery and history vividly medieval ; his *Grammarian's Funeral* vividly paints a historical period, and *The Ring and the Book* brings to life the dead world of ancient Rome, and renders the very soul of that remote age. He is equally successful in rendering the various periods and phases of art history or religious history. "Never, in poetry, was the desire of the historical critic for

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accuracy of fact and portraiture, combined with vivid presentation of life, so fully satisfied. In this respect, Tennyson was far his inferior. His Greek and medieval poems are modernised, and his imagination is uncritical. He fails to capture the spirit of the age, as does Browning.

Browning's Greater Originality

There is another contrast between the two : Browning is by far the more original of the two poets. Tennyson began his career with imitation ; he wrote in the beginning in the strain of the sentimental poets of 1822 to 1832. He achieved originality, his own distinctive method, only gradually. Browning, on the other hand, sprang into originality with his very first poem *Pauline*. The poem has its faults, but even in his faults Browning is fresh and distinct. The matter, the spirit, the verse-movement, of the poem are his own. He may show influences and admirations, but there is never any imitation. His dominant individuality separates him from Tennyson.

Tennyson and Browning : Their Attitude to Convention and Tradition

Further, Tennyson is conventional and conservative ; Browning, on the other hand, does not care for any conventions or social codes of conduct. Tennyson belonged to a certain class of English society, and he rarely got out of it in his poetry. He was always a slave to what is proper and recognized, and so lacks distinctness and freedom of personality. While Tennyson is conventional, Browning as an artist is quite free from such restraints. His poetry belongs to no special creed, or class of society, or morality. He said what his own thought and emotion urged him to say, with absolute carelessness, about the opinion of the world. In this respect, he represents a reaction against the tyranny of custom and tradition. In this way, he sat free the human soul from the restraints of convention, and lifted it to a higher level. Browning is a great emancipator of the human soul than Tennyson.

Tennyson a Nationalist : Browning a Cosmopolitian

Further, while Tennyson was insular, a distinctively English poet and a patriotic poet, Browning was a cosmopolitan and internationalist. Tennyson's pride in England made him narrowly nationalistic and he looked down with contempt upon other countries. He shares the English prejudices towards France, Ireland, Scotland, and other countries of Europe. His natural scenery, too, is of his own land, particularly of the place where he resided. When he took war as his subject, he took it exclusively from the history of his own country. There is no trace in his works of the national struggles of any other country. Browning, on the other hand, never displays any special patriotism. Rather, he is more Italian than English. He sympathises with the national characteristics, aspirations and struggles of countries like Spain, France, Germany, and above all Italy. "There are scarcely three poems in the whole of the seven numbers

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of the *Bells and Pomagranates* which even refer to England ; Italy is there and chiefly Italy. His scenery is not the scenery of England, but of several countries, but above all it is Italian, and vividly Italian. His most moving poems are those which treat of war, and the struggles of other countries, and not of his own. "It was not that he did not honour his country, but that, as an artist, he loved more the foreign lands ; and that in his deepest life he belonged less to England than to the world of man" (**S. A. Brooke**).

Browning was a cosmopolitan who was more interested in the universal, rather than in the national or the topical. It was an era of great changes in science and theology, and the age also witnessed the rise of democracy. But these movements are not reflected in his works as they are reflected in the works of Tennyson.

Tennyson's Lack of Catholicity : His Greater Simplicity

Browning was a complex character, one whose personality was made up of different racial elements. Thus there was much that was jewish in his intellect and character. His faith in an ever victorious Rightousness at the Centre of the universe, his Metaphysical minuteness, his fondness for remote and unexpected analogies, his illustrations and legends, his love of loud, bright colours, his love of music and the other fine arts, are all characteristically jewish. In numerous poems like *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, he has written of the jews with depth of feeling. "No English poet", says **S. A. Brooke**, "save Shakespeare, has spoken of the jew with compassion, knowledge and admiration till Browning wrote of him." *Tennyson was not complex, he did not have the catholicity of Browning.* He was English and only English. No English poet has been so distinctively English as Tennyson, and none of them so outside of England as Browning. This is another reason why Browning was not read in his age, but received recognition and fame only with the closing years of the century. It has increasingly been recognised that the key to human progress and well-being lies in internationalism rather than in nationalism Faith in the essential unity of man has grown, and this faith is expressed in all its intensity in the poetry of Browning. In this respect again, Browning was in advance of his age. Tennyson has nothing of this faith.

Browning's Appeal : More Universal and Permanent

As far as the social and political problems of the day are concerned, Tennyson frankly and clearly makes us know his views. Thus we know from his poety his reverence for the English Constitution ; we know from it, his views on such questions as the woman's question, war, competition, education, marriage, freedom, etc. Browning differs from Tennyson, and differs sharply in this respect. He does write of political and social problems, but he simply renders them in his poetry, he does not express his own views about them ; he takes no side. And he writes of these problems more

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with reference to other countries than his own country. He writes of ideas and ideals which should govern men in their relations with each other rather than of particular social problems of the day. On the whole, he avoids the topical and the ephemeral and concentrates on the universal and the general. *Browning rises above the merely contemporary, and hence his appeal has been far more enduring than that of Tennyson.*

As Poets of Human Nature

As poets of human nature, the two stand wide apart. Tennyson is the poet of human nature in its noble, common, and loving forms, as Browning is the closest to what is complex, subtle and uncommon in human nature. He represents the complex, the abnormal, the unusual and the unnatural and so his appeal is a limited one. Not that he does not deal with what is noble, simple and loving in man, but the treatment of the remote, the uncommon, the subtle and the involved is more characteristic of him. No doubt, he strove to paint human nature in the whole, and it is for this reason that his picture of humanity and human life is more varied, detailed and extensive than that of Tennyson, but the complex and the uncommon predominates, and often makes his rendering dull and prosaic. It was in his nature to do so, and he has done it well. But the representation of the complex, the remote, and the obscure, is the work of the intellect, and it makes much of his poetry, specially later poetry, no better than rhythmical prose. Browning does often render the simple and the loving in human nature—and such poems are among his masterpieces—but Tennyson does so more frequently and characteristically.

Tennyson : A Much Greater Artist

Then again, Tennyson is a far greater artist. Tennyson may be a lesser thinker, but Browning is a far lesser artist than Tennyson. A good poem must have a lovely form. In other words, it should have a noble style, harmonious composition, varied but at unity, and a sweet melody and versification. Browning's composition is rarely careful. More often than not it is broken up and overcrowded, as too many side issues and digressions are introduced. There is lack of artistic selection and ordering of material, everything that comes to the poet's mind is haphazardly introduced, and so the main impression is weakened. Tennyson's composition is always excellent and careful.

Greater Clarity of Tennyson's Style

Browning, no doubt, has an individual style, entirely original and devoid of all imitation. He is an original artist and in this respect more interesting than Tennyson. But Browning did not take care of his style, he ignored the rules of his art, and his freedom often degenerated into licence. He is often fantastic and grotesque.

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Further, he lacks clarity, and he is obscure not from any depth of thought but from sheer laziness and caprice. He makes even the easy difficult. He is difficult not by his thought, but by his expression of it. Tennyson like other great poets is clear. He puts the right word in the right place, but Browning finds pleasure, so to say, in putting his words into the wrong places. He leaves out words, leaves his sentences unfinished, and overloads what he writes with parentheses.

Tennyson, a More Musical Metrical Artist

As far as melody and versification are concerned, Browning is negligent in this respect also. He needlessly and frequently sacrifices it to his thought. He takes pleasure in the quaint oddities of sound, in jarring tricks with the metre, in fantastic and difficult arrangements of rhyme, in the systematic use of double rhymes, and often sacrifices melody and sweetness of versification. Tennyson has much more of this nobleness of composition ; his work is uniformly poetic, and so he must certainly be ranked as a greater artist, though not such a original one as Browning.

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6

Tennyson as a Representative Poet

Or

Tennyson's Poetry as a Mirror to the Age

Tennyson's Poetry : An Epitome of His Age

In every age there is some one poet or the other who represents in his poetry the very spirit of that age. Thus Tennyson in his poetry expresses the very spirit of the Victorian age. He stands in the same relation to his times as does Chaucer to the 14th century and Pope to the early eighteenth century England. "For nearly half a century" says **W. J. Long**, "Tennyson was not only a man and a poet, he was a voice, the voice of a whole people, expressing in exquisite melody their doubts and their faith, their griefs and their triumphs. As a poet who expresses not so much a personal as a national spirit, he is probably the most representative literary man of the Victorian era". And **Stopford A. Brooke** writes, "For more than sixty years he lived close to the present life of England, as far as he was capable of comprehending and sympathising with its movements ; and he interwove what he felt concerning it into his poetry. That Tennyson's poetry was an epitome of his times, that it exhibited the society, the art, the philosophy, the religion of his day, was proved by the welcome which all classes gave to it."

Horror of Extremes : The Victorian Compromise

The three important movements of the age were (*a*) Industrial revolution, (*b*) the rise of democracy, and (*c*) the rise of evolutionary science and its impact on religion. In all these matters Tennyson's views are characterised by the famous Victorian compromise or the avoidance of extremes. With the excesses of the French Revolution still fresh in their memory, the Victorians had a natural horror of all revolutionary enthusiasm. They craved for law, for order, for peace and stability. The dominant element in Tennyson's thought

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is his sense of law and order. He refers to the French Revolution as, "*Red fool fury of the Seine*", and advocates slow progress, the freedom which,

Slowly broadens down
From precedent to precedent.

He believes in disciplined, ordered evolution, rather than in revolution.

Narrow Nationalism

The Victorian age was an age of intense patriotism. The Victorians were proud of their Queen, they were proud of their country, and of their empire. This narrow nationalism of his age is reflected fully in Tennyson's poetry. "*Love thou thy land*", is his motto and not international love. Similarly, he believes in imperialism, that, 'subject races preferred good British government to self-government'. In other words, he shares the current belief in '*white man's burden*'. And in keeping with this he believes in a strong navy for England and writes proper national and patriotic poems such as *Maud*, *Charge of the Light Brigade*, and *Ode to the Duke of Wellington*. In his later years he shows more hardened conservatism than in his early years. This development may be seen by a comparison of *Locksley Hall* and *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*.

The Democratic Spirit

It was an age in which the democratic spirit was rising and the people were clamouring for equal rights and political freedom. Tennyson's attitude is one of compromise between the claims of the masses and the continuation of the older landed aristocracy. While he is in full sympathy with all sound measures for the amelioration of the poor, there is always a touch of the aristocrat in his attitude. He has no sympathy with the demand for equality, and in poems like *The Lord of Burleigh* he supports the claims of the landed aristocracy. One aspect of the rise of democracy was the movement for the emancipation of women. Tennyson deals with the question in *The Princess*. While he is in full sympathy for the cause of woman's education, his attitude towards the whole question is typically Victorian. The proper place of women is within the home, and they should try to be good housewifes and enjoy the blessed life of the home :

Man for the field and woman for the hearth;
Man for the sword and for the needle she,
Man to command and woman to obey,
All else confusion.

Materialism of the Age

As a result of the industrial revolution, the country was enjoying an unprecedented economic prosperity. This Mammon worship

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of his age is reflected in his *Maud, a Monodrama.* It reflects the unprecedented commercial prosperity of England at a time when "Britain's sole God", was the millionare. It also renders the revolt of a cultured mind against the corruption and hypocrisy of a society degraded by the worship of money.

Treatment of Love and Marriage

Tennyson represents the Victorian prudery, hapocrisy, and the spirit of compromise in his treatment of love, sex and marriage. In these matters, his attitude is typically Victorian. Conjugal love rather than romantic love is his ideal ; he has a horror of illicit passion. He cannot even contemplate the possibility of any relation between man and woman other than the conjugal. He emphasises the cultivation of domestic virtues of the home. He idealises married life. The kind of love that Tennyson upholds and likes is well exemplified in *The Miller's Daughter.* "It is a simple story of true sweet-hearting and married love, but raised into a steady and grave emotion worthy of a love built to last for life betwixt a man and a woman". Tennyson concentrates very firmly upon the advantages of spiritual as opposed to physical love, and the age felt satisfaction in his delineation of love. The Victorian feeling is voiced by the poet when he says,

Arise and fly,
The reeling Faun, the sensual beast,
Move upward, working out the beast,
And let the ape and tiger die.

Art and Morality

The Victorians believed that the aim of literature is essentially moral. They had a particular fascination for moralising and teaching lessons of morality to the younger generations. In this respect Tennyson is the mouthpiece of the Victorians. In his poetry there is a strong feeling for moral preaching and ethical edification. He is a moralist giving to his readers proper guidance for the wise conduct of life. Tennyson, to quote **Grierson**, "was determined to add the tin kettle of a didactic intention to the tails of his poems." He turned to the Greek legends not so much for the sake of their beauty as for their ethical significance. The legendary Ulysses imparts the message of action and urges the readers to,

Strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

In this way, he also represents the spirit of adventure, the urge for travel and discovery that stirred the age. Tennyson believes that the aim of the poet should not only be to provide aesthetic delight. He must also teach and his poetry should serve as an animating and enlivening force for his generation. In *The Palace of Art* the poet describes and condemns that spirit of aestheticism whose sole religion is the worship of Beauty and Knowledge for their own sakes, and

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which ignores human responsibility and obligation to one's fellowmen.

The Scientific Spirit

Another important event of Victorian England was the rise of evolutionary science and its impact on religious faith. Says **Hadow**, "His attitude towards the scientific progress of his day is more difficult to determine. Sometimes he speaks of it with a sort of impatience." '*Have these men*' asked Socrates, '*solved all the problems of human life, that they have leisure for abstract speculations* ?' *and in like manner Tennyson asks, "Is it well that while we range with Science, glorying in the time, City children soak and blacken soul and sense in city slime* ?" Sometimes, again, he seems to shrink back in dismay before the immensities that Science has revealed. '*What is our life,*' he asks, "*What is it all but a trouble of ants in the gleam of a million, million of suns* ?

Yet it would be unfair to estimate him by such passages as these alone. Like almost all poets, he feels Science as something alien and remote ; he cannot scale its heights or breathe in the rarity of its atmosphere : but for all that he can honour its work and approve its singleness of purpose. 'His poetry', says **Edward Dowden**, "exhibits such imaginative sympathy as a poet who is not himself capable of scientific thought may have with Science ; a delight in all that is nobly ordered, and a profound reverence for law." Here we seem to have the conclusion in a single word. "To Tennyson disorder was the worst of evils, and he gladly welcomed as an ally the power which was vindicating the supremacy of law throughout the entire field of Nature." The impact of science on his poetry is seen nowhere to such advantage as in his treatment of nature. It is seen in his minuteness of observation and accuracy and preciseness of delineation. He sees both sides of the picture—the harsher as well as the pleasanter—and is quite aware of the brutal struggle for existence that goes on everywhere in the external world. He finds nature, "red in tooth and claw", full of rapine and plunder. Indeed, the scientific spirit has rather a chilling effect on imagination, and this lack af imagination characterises Tennyson's nature-poetry.

Religion : Doubts and Anxieties

The rise of science resulted in religious scepticism, doubts, anxieties and uncertainties and Tennyson is a typical Victorian in his efforts to reach a compromise between science and religion. Thus in a famous passage of *In Memoriam* he says,

Let knowledge grow from more to more
And more of reverence in us dwell
That mind and soul, according well,
May make one music as before.

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He would have science, but he would also have religion, and he would have the two work in harmony for the realisation of the Victorian dream of progress unlimited. "The Victorians", says **Harold Nicholson**, "desired to be assured that all was for the best ; they desired to discover some compromise which, while not outraging their intellect and their reason, would none the less soothe their conscience and restore their faith, if not completely, at least sufficiently to allow them to believe in some ultimate purpose and more important still, in the life after death." Tennyson does actually arrive at the compromise which the Victorians had desired him to do. In some poems and stanzas of *In Memoriam*, he puts forward the claims of science. He upholds the theory of Evolution propounded by Drawin, and supports the view that honest doubt is better than blind faith :

There remains more faith in honest doubt
Believe me, than in half the creeds.

In others, he emphasises the claims of religion, God and soul. He triumphantly declares his faith in God and the immortality of the soul and in a life beyond death. He advises the people of his age to cling to faith beyond all forms of faith, to trust and hope, to look to,

One far-off divine event
To which the whole creation moves.

In *The Higher Pantheism* he declares the supremacy of God and regards Him as the supreme controller of the universe :

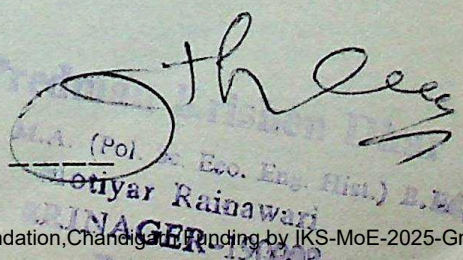
God is law, say the wise, O Soul, and let us rejoice,
For if He thunder by law, the thunder is yet his voice

In every object of nature, and also in the sun, moon and the stars, the poet sees the vision of God :

The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills and the plains
Are not these a Soul ! the vision of Him who reigns.

Conclusion

Thus in all these respects, Tennyson represents the Victorian smugness, its narrowness, its hypocrisy, its prudery, its compromise, its doubts, anxieties and uncertainties. But when all is said and done, it is as an artist that we reverence him, and it is as an artist that he will live. His longer narrative poems, which deal with political, moral, social, and economic questions of the day may suffer an eclipse, but his lyrics and his romantic tales, which do not reflect the age, shall be loved and admired as long as the English language and literature last.



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7

Tennyson as a Thinker

Or

The Philosophy of Tennyson

Or

Tennyson's Views, Social, Political, Religious, Moral, etc.

Lack of Depth and Originality

E. Albert rightly points out that as a thinker, "*Tennyson lacked depth and originality.*" Many of his views are puerile and trivial, and much of his thought has grown out-dated. Still his poetry is a valuable social document and reflects the dominant trends and attitudes of the day. This justifies a consideration of his philosophy, and of his views, social, moral, political, religious, etc.

His Views on Social Subjects : Their Unreality

Tennyson's political and social views are determined largely by two factors. First, he was an aristocrat by birth, and secondly, the horrors of the French Revolution were still fresh in his memory when he began to write. His attitude, therefore, towards progress, towards the comman man and his suffering, and towards politics, both domestic and foreign, is conservative rather than liberal. It is the attitude of a Tory landlord. He has little faith in democracy, equality and fraternity ; he cannot even visualise the abolition of the rights and privileges enjoyed by the people of rank and birth. He has no real, warm and intimate sympathy with the poor and the suffering. His attitude towards the poor is gracious and kindly, as well as gently patronising. He seems to have no real and genuine understanding of such social problems as unemployment, low wages, drunkenness, poverty, over-crowding, squalor, etc. He saw a vast amount of social misery around him, and there is a good deal in his

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poetry about the sorrows and hardships of the poor. But genuine as his sympathy may be, there is an air of unreality about its expression. This is due partly to the fact that his views are put usually into the mouths of his weaker characters ; the dismal young prig in *Locksley Hall*, or the neurotic hero of *Maud*. They do not seem to spring direct and spontaneous from the poet's heart. The unreality of these tirades is partly due also to the fact that they are couched in vague, rhetorical terms, and exhibit no realisation on Tennyson's part that anything is wrong with our present social organism. The one remedy that he repeatedly suggests for the evils of commercialism, is war. Could any more hopeless panacea for social distress be formulated than this ?

The Woman's Question

Tennyson's exclusion from the world during the later years of his life, put him more and more out of touch with concrete realities. This, added to the natural conservatism of age, makes his utterances on social subjects practically valueless. In one direction alone did Tennyson really contribute suggestive ideas, and that was when he was dealing with the movement for woman's emancipation. In *The Princess* he was for the first and last time really in advance of his age. "There is a healthy progressive note in this poem, and reactionary as it may seem to many modern minds, it seems to me on the whole a just and sympathetic presentment in poetic form of the problems connected with woman's place in society." The famous line, "*Woman is not undeveloped man, but diverse*," goes to the root of the sex question, and might well be pondered over by certain extremists today. The Emancipation of Woman has passed through many phases since Tennyson's day ; yet Tennyson's general estimate cannot be improved upon :

"The Woman's cause is Man's ;
They rise and sink together,"

Tennyson sees in marriage and home life the best outlet for woman's energies, but he certainly does not restrict her to these :

And so these twain upon the skirts of Time
Sit side by side, full sunned in all their powers.

"It is true Tennyson does not dwell upon the outlets for women who are not mothers and who have no homes to look after, but these scarcely come within the range of the poem, and at any rate are implied in the educational training laid down by Ida. A poem is not a handbook ; but the prescriptions laid down by Tennyson, if we allow a certain latitude for the pontifical air of the poet at times, are both clearly stated and reasonably put."

Ideals of Love and Marriage

Tennyson extols domestic virtues and the chastity and purity of the home. *Wedded love is his ideal ; he frowns upon illicit love or*

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love outside marriage, No amount of passion, however true and intense it may be, can excuse in his eyes the breaking of the marriage tie. Says **Compton-Rickett** in this connection, "But in his general outlook on life, he grew to distrust more and more, passion as an elemental force, and strove to idealise and spiritualise it, whether as a force in political society or in sexual relationships. This again is quite alien to Browning's method and outlook ; and the effect upon his poetry of this fear of excess, horror of extravagance, is not altogether happy."

Political Views : His Conservatism

This horror of excess, this love of moderation, this faith in law, order and duty, is also seen in his political views. He believes in ordered, gradual progress rather than in sudden change. He has a horror of revolution, which he calls, "*the red fool fury of the Siene.*" His political sympathies had a tinge of revolutionary enthusiasm when he was quite a youth and still to some extent under the influence of the great romantic poets. But his poem on *Poland* is his one solitary poem on liberty, while his own political faith is well expressed in the following familiar lines :

A land of settled government;
A land of just and old renown;
Where Freedom slowly broadens down
From precedent to precedent.
Where faction seldom gathers head,
But by degrees to fullness wrought,
The strength of some diffusive thought
Hath time and space to work and spread.

This is typically English, and a better expression of the old Whig ideal it would be hard to find. He understood excellently well the character of the English race. "He understood it as well as Bentham did, and there is no slight similarity between the outlook of the two men on the problem of social politics. To Tennyson, as to Bentham, the democratic ideal was a middle-class ideal ; it was, moreover, a strongly individualistic ideal. Orderly development was dear to both men ; and the notion of, 'a land of settled government, and of freedom slowly broadening down', was conceived in the true Benthamite spirit. The radical democratic passion of Shelley, that sought to obliterate class divisions in the main, found no response in Tennyson's breast". He was an aristocrat in feeling, and though quick enough to resent the abuse of class privileges, had no more confidence in the voice of the people than Carlyle himself. **Lyall** has very well summarised his political views thus : "In Tennyson we have the Englishman's ingrained abhorrence of unruly disorder, the tradition of a State well balanced, of liberty fenced in by laws, of veneration for the past ; we have the hatred of fanaticism in any shape, political or clerical, the distrust of popular impatience, the belief in the gradual betterment of human i lls."

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Once he was asked what politics he held ; he answered, "I am of the same politics as Shakespeare, Bacon and every sane man."

Patriotism : Imperialism

Tennyson was intensely patriotic, and his patriotism is narrow and insular ; he has none of the cosmopolitanism of Browning. He shares the current faith in, 'the white man's burden', the civilising mission of the English people, and is proud of the empire over which the sun never sets. Lines like the following are typical of Tennyson's love of his country :

There is no land like England
Where'er the light of day be ;
There are no hearts like English hearts,
Such hearts of oak as they be,
There is no land like England
Where'er the light of day be :
There are no men like Englishmen,
So tall and bold as they be.

There is much that is fine and noble in the patriotic spirit of Tennyson ; and few of our poets have embodied that spirit in more dignified verse. A good example of this is his stirring *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington.* Patriotism flourishes best in minds charged with historical associations, and imbued strongly with the continuity of the present with the past ; especially if we add to this the passion for locality. The exigencies of verse that demand a picturesque background, are responsible probably for the predominating militant note in *The Charge of the Light Brigade, A Ballad of the Fleet, The Defence of Lucknow, The Revenge, etc.* Yet, taking his war poetry on its own merits, it exhibits a genuine love of the bulldog qualities of the English race.

In the patriotic verse dealing with the glories of the, "storied past," we always see Tennyson as a hater,

Of the lawless crown,
As of the lawless crowd.

declaiming fiercely against, "the falsehood of extremes," and extolling, with unwearying zeal, law and order. "On the whole, Tennyson's influence in national politics was a wholesome and tonic one. He helped to foster that love of country that should animate a people, by dwelling on the finer qualities of national character, and insisting on the value of ancient forms and traditions." It would have been much better if Tennyson had understood other nationalities as well as he did his own race, since cosmopolitan sympathies strengthen, in place of weakening—as some imagine—the spirit of patriotism. But, despite this limitation, Tennyson's influence in the main has been a valuable and salutary one.

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God and Religion

Tennyson's views on God and religion find their completest expression in *In Memoriam*. The poem shows the poet's faith in the Immortality of the soul, in the existence of God, and in His Love and Mercy. But science has made him aware of the brutal struggle for existence in nature, and of the insignificance of men in the scheme of things. Therefore, even here, even in this masterly poem, he is unable to reconcile God's Omnipotence, Love and Mercy with the existence of Evil. If God is an Omnipotent creater, if God is Love, how is it that all nature is, "*red in tooth and claw*", and, "*one with rapine* ?" If God is Love why is there so much suffering, evil and misery ? Therefore, in order to reconcile God's Love with the fact of suffering, he worked out a compromise: "*God exists because the human heart feels an instinctive need of His existence : that the soul must be immortal because any other solution was unthinkable*" **(Harold Nicolson)**. "It is hard", once he said, "to believe in God, but it is harder not to believe. I believe in God, not from what I see in nature, but from what I find in man." It is the confession of a tortured soul, a soul beset with doubts and perplexities, one which would find life intolerable without this faith in its own immortality and the presence of a divine creator watching benignly over it. Life becomes tolerable and meaningful only if one has faith, "*Faith beyond the forms of Faith*," faith in God and His Love, and optimistic faith in,

One far off divine event
To which the whole creation moves.

Compton-Rickett aptly summarises Tennyson's religious position in the following words : "No poet was more exercised by religious problems than he ; and no poet was more sensitive to scientific thought than he. But his attitude is an attitude of compromise ; he propounds a *via media* between the materialistic science of his day and dogmatic Christianity. His solution for the heart-searching and uncertitudes of the time was an undogmatic religion, that was at bottom intuitional. Historic Christianity scarcely weighed with him at all." "*There's something that watched over us, and our individuality endures ; that's my faith, and that's all my faith*", he is reported to have said on one occasion to a friend. And this is the sum and substance of his faith as expressed in his poetry.

Tennyson has been called a mystic ; it would be more correct to say he was mystical. He was not a mystic in the sense that Vaughan and George Herbert or Coleridge and Blake were mystics. He was rather a rationalist with a tenacious strain of mysticism in his nature ? "No thorough-going mystic would have dwelt at such length, and with such significant emphasis, upon the difficulties of religious faith ; no thorough-going rationalist would have tried to solve the difficulties by claiming for the intuition of the heart, a way out of the morass of scepticism." In his

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doubts and uncertainties, and in his attempts to reason out his religious position, he shows the influence of science. His concession to science, and his careful and concise statement of the purely scientific position, interested and attracted the scientist ; his sympathetic presentment of the doubter's position, especially his line, "*There lives more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds,*" captivated the religious waverer ; while the religious were delighted by the triumph of faith at the close of the poem.

Ethics and Morality

Tennyson's ethical thought inspires him more happily as a poet than does his religious philosophy, for it takes him into a clearer and saner atmosphere ; and his insistence on self-control, formulated in his beautiful poem *Œnone*, recurs again and again in his serious poetry. Law and order are for him rules of conduct ; disorder is the antithesis of rational existence. He saw it disturbing the life around him, and loathed it. And so, he also held fast to those elements in life that made for stability. A quiet, dignified, orderly existence —such was Tennyson's ideal, and he used all the resources of his gracious art to impress its value on men's minds.

Tennyson is the poet of discipline, not the poet of freedom This fact impresses us in all his work, whether dealing with religion or with politics. It inspires his classical poems, and animates *the Idylls* and *The Dramas*. Arthur is a great man because he stands for law, and Harold is great because he strove to make, "Jarring earldoms", move, "to music and order". In *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After* he becomes almost hysterical in his horror of lawlessness and licence.

Conclusion

Tennyson's insistence on law is certainly valuable as a corrective to the anarchic tendencies in life and literature ; but it is not productive of the greatest poetry. "*Compromise may be an excellent rule of conduct, but it does not thrill the imagination. It is a pleasant thing to sail in peaceful waters and hug the sheltering coast ; but life after all is a great adventure, and little would be accomplished were there no intrepid idealists, willing to stake their all on a forborn hope, or a wild adventure.*" It is good to cry out for more reverence ; it is better to strive for ampler progress. Temporary harm, momentary disorder, must be incurred by the social reformers who would renovate society. The very sanity and vigour of life depend on the men who dare the splendid, impossible things, for as Browning said "*A man's reach should exceed his grasp—or what's heaven for ?*"

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8

Tennyson's Treatment of Nature

Or

Tennyson as a Poet of Nature

His Originality : Realism

Tennyson was a great lover of the out-of-door world. His treatment of nature is unique and original in several respects. Everywhere it reveals the impact of the scientific spirit of the time. As a result, says **Harold Nicolson**, "he placed accuracy of observation above the imaginative qualities. The backgrounds of his poems are always scenes or landscapes which he had himself visited ; their foregrounds and their similes are drawn from the flowers that he himself had culled." His nature treatment is characterised by accuracy and realism. He does not impart to nature a life and spirit in the manner of Wordsworth ; unlike Wordsworth, he does not remain blind to the harsher and unpleasanter aspects of Nature. Says **S. A. Brooke**, "Mainly speaking, the difference between Wordsworth and Tennyson as poets of Nature consists in the absence from Tennyson's mind of any belief or conception of a life in nature. He described Nature, on the whole, as she was to his own senses, as she appeared on the outside. He did it with extraordinary skill, observation, accuracy and magnificence. He did not conceive Nature as alive. He did not love her as a Living Being, as Wordsworth did As a poet of Nature, he is vivid, accurate, lively, but cold."

Fusion of Scientific Accuracy and Poetic Sensibility

Tennyson's renderings of nature are characterised by clarity, vividness, minuteness and accuracy. His perception is scientific but everywhere it is modified by his poetic sensibility. Says **Compton-Rickett** in this connection, "*No poet has ever been more sensitive to the varied loveliness of Nature, to the sensuous glory of things. Nature's more august moods are better interpreted by Wordsworth ; her ecstasies more subtly felt by Shelley ; but the varying and*

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complex spell of her multitudinous moods as a whole has found no finer artistic expression than is given us in the verse of Tennyson. Accurate observation and delicate poetic feeling are happily blended."

His Nature Descriptions

In his descriptions of Nature, he can give us large effects, as in this epitome of an autumn storm,

The last red leaf is whirled away,
The rooks are blown about the sky,

and the superb image of,

Such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam.

or this, expressive of desolation,

He is not here ; but far away,
The noise of life begins again,
And ghastly thro' the drizzling rain,
On the bald street breaks the blank day.

And he can impress us also with microscopic effects. "Indeed, excepting Crabbe, no poet ever dealt with the minutie of Nature so well as Tennyson." Could anything be more apt for combined accuracy of perception and beauty of delineation than touches such as these :

Of the dragon fly he says,

A living flash of light he flew ;

of the sunflower, that,

Rays round with flames her disc of seed ;

of dark hair, that,

More black than ash buds in the front of March.

He reminds us with delicate emphasis how, with the coming of spring, "rosy plumelets tuft the larch" ; how autumn lays, "a fiery finger on the leaves" ; and notes with the eye of a naturalist, "the primrose of the later year." We feel that he has actually seen all that he describes. Never does his fancy carry him into the realm of unreal imagery. The beautiful little touch bearing on the clouds of pollen that float from the staminal flower of the yew, exhibits yet again the exactitude of the botanist, as well as the vision of the poet :

"Beneath a world-old yew, darkening half
The cloisters, on a gustful April morn,
That puff'd the swaying branches into smoke.

"Everywhere indeed the observation of the scientist is glorified by the sensibility of the artist ; the stark fact is clad in lovely imagery."

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Nature Sympathetic to Man

And if the objective, scientific touch is one feature of his Nature poetry, another feature lies in its atmospheric subjectivity. Tennyson never paints Nature with Wordsworth, or even Byron, as something outside of Man, with a life, spirit, and purpose of its own. Nature for him is always a background for reflecting some human emotion ; it carries no message or blessing of its own, but harmonises with the moods of man. Thus in depicting moods of indolence, of sorrow, of love, he chooses such scenic background as may best accentuate these moods. In *The Lotos-Eaters*, the companions of Ulysses read their own feelings into their surroundings; while the poet suggests by many subtle touches how well the dreamy, languid atmosphere of the place chimes in with their mood. They have eaten of the indolence-giving fruit, and break into song :

"There is sweet music here that softer falls,
Than petals from blown roses on the grass,
Or night dews on still waters between walls
Of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass ;
Music that gentlier on the spirit lies,
Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes ;
Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies.

Why should they trouble themselves, think the singers, with the distresses of life ? Why not be as the flower that ripens in its place, ripens and decays and falls. Again, mark how the desolate background of *Mariana* suits the mood of despondent isolation ; the melancholy autumnal touch in *Tithonus*, the tranquil charm of the sea-coast village in *Enoch Arden*. Sorrow in varying degrees of poignancy serves the poet as the inspiration of some of the loveliest pictures in *In Memoriam*. In short, "In his poetry, nature is humanised. She rejoices or is steeped in gloom accordingly as man is in a joyous or a sorrowful mood. Her beauty, calm, and music are of our creation. If we are intensely absorbed in ourselves, we seldom notice her. She appears in her diverse colours and moods, not through any intrinsic quality or consciousness in her, but simply through an associative faculty in ourselves."

The Seamy Side of Nature

While Wordsworth observed nature only in her spring-time glory, Tennyson readers her both when she is in desolation, and when she is decked out in her Sunday best. He does not shut her eyes to the wilder and the harsher in nature. He finds a brutal struggle for existence going on everywhere in Nature. For him, Nature is, "red in tooth and claw". In *Maud* he draws the attention of his readers to the sinister and harsher aspects of nature, to the cruelty and bloodshed that is Nature's law :

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For Nature is one with rapine, a harm no preacher can heal,
The Mayfly is torn by the swallow, the sparow is speared by the shrike
And the whole little world where I sit is a world of plunder and prey.

While Wordsworth found a "Holy plan" at work in Nature, Tennyson finds no evidence of God in the objects of Nature :

I found him not in world or sun,
Or eagle's wing, or insect's eye.

Rather in Nature he hears a voice shouting to him, "believe no more."

Nature, Insular and Local

However, he is one with Wordsworth in one respect. His nature-descriptions, like those of Wordsworth, are all localised. They are all drawn from his personal observation of nature in Surrey, Kent, and the Isle of Weight. His landscapes are thoroughly English ; he is insular and not cosmopolitan like Browning. The natural scenery in *Enoch Arden* is based on Freshwater. The scenery in *Oenone* is drawn from the valley of Canteretz. The pictures in *Mariana in the South* owe their inspiration to the sights and scenes near Perpignan. It is only in *The Lotos-Eaters* that the landscape appears to be a creation of pure imagination. "The island of the lotos-eaters is no more than an idealised Torquay."

Love of Flowers

In his nature poetry we have loving references to English birds and flowers. Tennyson was the poet of English flowers, trees and birds. "Of flowers and trees he must be held to be the supreme master, above all who have written in English, perhaps indeed in any poetry. Tennyson has painted them all—flowers, wild and cultivated, trees, herbs, woods, downs and moors—with the magic of a Turner. As flowers, hills, trees and rivers uttered to Wordsworth a new moral Decalogue, so they seemed to Tennyson, as they did to Turner, radiant with a fanciful beauty which no man had seen before" (**Harrison**). He paints flowers, hills and dales with almost a Keats-like sensuousness.

As a Sea-Poet

Tennyson is one of those few poets in the English language who have painted the sea with feeling and sensitiveness. For example,

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All the sea,
Drove like a cataract, and all the sand,
Swept like a river.

And,

The great waters break
Whitening for half a league, and thin themselves
Far over sands marbled with moon and cloud.

As a poet of sea, Tennyson has few equals.

In short, Tennyson's nature poetry is one of the greater glories of English literature.

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9

Tennyson as a Lyric Poet

His Lyrical Impulse : All Pervasive and Long-lasting

Tennyson's genius was essentially lyrical. He produced exquisite lyrics all through his long span of poetic activity, and he kept up his power of melody and song right upto the age of eighty. The lyric impulse never dried up in him. Not only was his lyric impulse long-lasting, it was also all-pervasive. It penetrates even his longer poems. Thus *In Memoriam* is essentially a collection of lyrics which voice the poet's loneliness, doubts, anxieties and fears ; *Maud* also is a series of lyrics, in which the story is told largely through these lyrics and each lyric is an expression of a mood and situation ; the songs of *The Princess* constitute the most glorious lyric poetry ever written in the English language. Says **Hugh Walker** in this connection, "*In Memoriam* is essentially a lyrical poem and the years immediately before and after its publication are those in which Tennyson's lyrical genius was in fullest flower". *Maud* is also a lyrical poem. The beautiful songs interspersed between the parts of *The Princess* belong to this period. The lyrics of these years are on the whole superior both in fervour of passion and in weight of thought to the earlier lyrics. Some of the songs, like, "Tears, idle tears", are, as songs, almost overcharged with thought, yet they are beautifully melodious ; and Tennyson never wrote anything more full of exquisite sound than, "The splendour falls on castle walls".

Passion and Intensity

The passionate fervour of which Tennyson's lyric strain was capable is best illustrated from *Maud*. In fact, the faults of this poem are more than redeemed by such lyric outbursts as, "Come into the garden, Maud", and, "O that 'twere possible." The first is perhaps the most splendid, as it is one of the most justly popular of all Tennyson's lyrics, while the second is among the most exquisite and delicately finished. "*These pieces have a deeper tone of feeling and more reality of passion than we find in Tennyson's earlier lyrics.*" If an anthology of Tennyson's poetry was to be prepared to-day, it would

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include his songs as well as such intensely passionate and lovely lyrics as *Mariana* ; *Oriana* ; *Fatima* ; *Merman* ; *The Lotos-eaters* ; *Ulysses*; *Break, Break, Break* ; *Locksley Hall* ; *The Brooke* ; *Tears, Idle Tears*; and many others. "The wealth as well as the beauty of Tennyson's lyrical production," says **Harrison**, "places him in the foremost rank of our lyricists, strong as our literature has been for many centuries in that form of poetry."

Pure Lyrics

Harold Nicolson discussing the greatness of Tennyson as a lyric poet points out that the Lyric in the original Greek sense denoted a poem meant to be sung to the lyre, but in common usage it has come to denote a poem of personal emotion which can be sung, with or without accompaniment. In its wider, but equally legitimate, sense it means a poem of personal emotion, or personal thoughts and sentiments, which has a song-quality. Even in this extended interpretation, melody and spontaneity are taken for granted. "Interwoven with reflective matter it may leave further and further behind the passionate simplicity of musical expression, and reach the thoughtful complexity of a sonnet, an elegy, or an ode." *In other words, the lyric may either be simple and musical, it may have a 'song-quality' or it may be more complex, mixed with reflection and thought.* Tennyson writes both these kinds of lyrics. When the inspiration is upon him, he writes "pure lyrics", lyrics of the highest order, lyrics which sing as if by some magic of their own. Scattered throughout his longer works there are exquisite songs, which are among the finest lyrics in the English language. They have been praised by one critic after another, for their simplicity, for their music and melody, and for their intensity and poignancy. Writes **Harold Nicolson**, "For the songs of Tennyson, written separately or as interludes to break the flow of narrative, are among the best in the English language, and in them we find, as rarely in his other poems, the absolute ecstasy, the "purest" poetry, perhaps, which he ever composed. For in his songs, and predominantly in the songs incorporated in *The Princess*, his poetic energy was concentrated wholly on the magic of words." He sang, for once, "but as the linnets sing"; he sang, for once, "without a conscience and an aim". The result comes to one with a shock of delight. For they vibrate, these songs of Tennyson, with something vague and poignant, with :

> *"I knew not what of wild and sweet,*
> *Like that strange song I heard Apollo sing*
> *While Ilion like a mist rose into towers.*

And they vibrate with more than this—they vibrate with that, "divine excess", with that glimpse of the Dionysiac, that unmistakable sense of impulsive continuity falling haphazard upon the only word ; they vibrate with that conviction of the invitable and the inimatable, with that conviction of the inspired, which only the greatest lyric poets

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can achieve in the moments when they feel the force and beauty of their own genius.

Their Musical Quality

Such lyrics are clearly beyond criticism and even elucidation. The key notes of a lyric are music and melody and subjectivity. A lyric is musical, and it is an expression of the poet's personal emotions. *Tennyson's lyrics are among the most musical in the English language.* Words are carefully chosen both with reference to their sense and their sound. His skill in the manipulation of vowel sounds, in the use of alliteration and liquid consonants, and in the avoidance of harsher sounds, has been universally acknowledged. His music is dexterously varied according to the requirements of thought and emotion. In *Maud*, for example, there are subtle variations in cadence according to mood and situation, and in *In Memoriam* subtle variations are introduced in pause, cadence and rhythm, and thus monotony is avoided with great art and skill. In the *Lotos-eaters*, the longurous music of the long-drawn out line expresses to a nicety the lethargy and the longing for rest of the sailors who have eaten the lotos fruit. As **Selincourt** points out the charm of the best lyrics of his lies in the spell of words, in the secret and indefinable beauty of words and tune. *The Brook*, the lovely song, *Come down into the Garden, Maud* ; *Break, Break, Break*, etc., are triumphs of Tennyson's musical skill. He is second to none in this respect.

The Personal Note

Tennyson's genius was essentially subjective, he had the true temperament of a lyricist. Whatever may be the subject chosen, it is coloured, by his own personal moods and emotions. Thus his *Ulysses*, a classical lyric, written after Hallam's death, expresses his own urge to move forward and face life despite the breavement he has suffered. *The Idylls of the King* are similarly suffused with the poet's own moods and emotions. Thus the gloom of Sir Bedivere at the passing away of Arthur is Tennyson's own mood at the recent death of his friend. *Crossing the Bar* is expressive of the mood of the poet just on the eve of his death. It is prophetic, the dark shadow of approaching death has already fallen across the soul of the poet. *All his life Tennyson was a lonely soul full of terror and despair, and this haunting wail of terror and despair is heard again and again in Tennyson's lyrics.*

Complex Lyrics : Thought and Reflection

This is more so the case with the lyrics of the *In Memoriam.* The pieces are the finest example of the lyrics in which personal emotion is interwoven with reflective matter resulting in complexity rather than simplicity, and as **O. Elton** points out such complex lyrics are more characteristic of the poet. The lyrics of *In Memoriam* are

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a landmark in English poetry, combining, as they do, the poetry of ideas with the poetry of feeling. **O. Elton** rightly says that the power of the elegy lies less in, "*playing over ideas than in playing with the logic of feeling—in the analysis of grief and hope, of memory and vision.*" The lyrics of *In Memoriam* are remarkable as expressions of terror, loneliness. and the inner void that turns Nature and Life into nightmares. One has only to recall the, "muffled motions", that blindly drown the bases of his life in tears ; "The desert in the mind" made by the shade that crossed his life ; and the cantos in which the poet's wasted heart is mirrored in the moods of Nature. From his own personal grief, the poet reaches out to the wail of all humanity, to the problems of Divine Purpose, the meaning of individual life, of evil and pain. Some of the lyrics are of profound psychological interest ; the most striking illustration of it are the following stanzas that describe the chaotic images that pass through his mind as he lies awake at night :

Cloud-towers by ghostly masons wrought,
A gulf that ever shuts and gapes,
A hand that points, and palled shapes
In shadowy thoroughfares of thought ;
And crowds that stream from yawning doors,
And shoals of pucker'd faces, drive ;
Dark bulks that tumble half alive,
And lazy lengths on boundless shores.

Variety of Moods

J.C. Grierson in his *Critical History of English Poetry* points out that Tennyson is a poet of, "not so much of passion and passionate thinking as of moods—moods, subtle, and luxurious and sombre, moods in which it is not always easy to discern the line that separates waking from dreaming. ..." The moods to which Tennyson has given poetic expression are as varied as his metres, and include a rare feeling for the beauty of English scenery, the mind of the peasant in many of its phases, humorous and tragic, the interpretation of classical legend, the reproduction of the soul of some Greek and Roman poets, the colour and beauty, if not all the peculiar ethical and religious tone, of mediaeval romance, complexities of mind and even pathalogical subtleties of emotion, the brooding of a sensitive spirit over the riddles of life and death, and good and evil. Browning has a wider range, is less insular, more curious about exotic types and more subtle in tracing the dialectics of mood aud situation. But he does not enter more intensely into the purely emotional aspect of the mood, and he does not steep the whole in such a wealth of colour and melody. This variety of moods is best illustrated by *Maud, a Monodrama*, in which the entire story of the wooing and winning of a girl has been told through a series of exquisite lyrics which have no parallel in the English language. *The moods in the poem range from melodramatic horror in the opening stanzas to passionate and joyous*

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melodies in the middle part, sinking into a dolorous wail, rising into frenzy and closing with the trumpet note of war. In the beautiful song of rapturous expectation, "Come into the garden, Maud", the poet rises to the highest point of his lyrical verse. According to **O. Elton**, each of the lyrics, "*introduces a new moment in the situation, with its special mood, which is embodied in the metre.*"

Some Limitations

Tennyson was a great lyric poet, he had the temperament of a true lyricist, but the lyric impulse in him was not allowed free play by his other interests, narrative, dramatic, even epic. As **Harold Nicolson** in his book on Tennyson points out, "Temperamentally he possessed all the qualities of a lyric poet. His genius was essentially subjective. His was a lonely soul, melancholy and afraid. The deepest note in his soul is one of frightened agony, as of some wild creature caught in a trap at night." But this lyric element in his genius was retarded by the fact that, "he was unable, except in isolated moments, to dissociate his lyrical energy from all other energies—ethical, theological and didactic. Had he been less reserved and allowed his lyric emotion a freer flow, had he realised that what he felt was infinitely more important than what he thought, he would have been the greatest lyric poet of his day." *But his lyric gift was lost in his prophetic mission.*

Spontaneity is an important quality of the true lyric. The lyric poet sings with strains of unpremeditated art, but Tennyson is too self-conscious, there is too much of after-thought, too much of revision and excision for such spontaneity. *The artist in him retards his lyrical- impulse and it is only occasionally that his lyrics acquire that spontaneity which we associate with Shelley and Burns.* Tennyson's lyrics do not seem to come directly from the heart, and so they do not go to the heart of the readers. The reason is that they are not produced by a spontaneous inspiration and there seems to be a conscious and deliberate artistic effort behind them. Even the music of his lyrics is the music of recitation, of memory, of thought, rather than of song. *The artistic embelishment of his lyrics stands in the way of their free, musical flow and they seem more to be the lyrics to be read than to be sung.*

Conclusion

Tennyson is a great lyric poet, but owing to such shortcomings he cannot take his rank with the greatest lyric poets of the world. The Olympian radiance of a lyric by Sappho or Sopphocles, the audible ring of Shelley's lyrics, the moving quality of Shakespeare's songs, or the pinching pathos of the Scottish songs of Burns and Scott, is hard to find in Tennyson's lyrics. In fact, as **Oliver Elton** has pointed out, "*Tennyson is more at home in classical lyrics... odelike or commemorative—carefully concerted pieces, be they short or long, with full rolling lines, than in the briefer spontaneous kind*".

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10

Tennyson : Art and Technique

Or

Tennyson : Language, Diction and Versification

Or

Tennyson as a Metrical Artist

Characteristics of His Style

Tennyson may not be great as a thinker, his thought may be outdated and puerile, but there can be no denying the fact that he is a consummate artist. He polished and repolished his verses, till near perfection was reached. The result is that his style is marked by sincerity, clarity, lucidity and simplicity. He is never ambiguous or uncertain. His language is uniformly excellent, never mean, shabby or low. His diction has sublimity, dignity and stateliness about it. His imagery, similes and metaphors, words and phrases, are original and apt. Every word is carefully chosen both with reference to sense and sound, and in this way his diction becomes melodious and musical. Tennyson was one of those poets who, like Milton and Wordsworth, consider themselves as consecrated spirits. This sense of their vocation makes them reverence their work rather than themselves ; it imparts stateliness to their verse, gives it a moral vigour, a spiritual strength, and emerges in a certain grandeur or splendour of style.

Epigrammatic Terseness

Tennyson tries to say whatever he has to say in the fewest possible words. The result is that his style acquires an epigrammatic terseness, finish and polish. Every word is carefully chosen and every phrase is well-chiselled. "*With the exception of Gray*", says **Grierson**, "*English poetry had produced nothing since Milton that is so obviously the result of strenuous and unwearied pursuit of perfection of form.*" He

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gave considerable thought to the art of expression, and he succeeded in coining phrases, "jewels five words long"—with the dexterity of a skilled craftsman. In exquisite finish and neatness he was directly in the line of Alexander Pope. Many of his lines have passed into common proverbs because of their terseness of expression. For example :

1. *To follow knowledge like a sinking star.*
2. *Knowledge comes but wisdom lingers.*
3. *Old age hath yet his honour and his toil.*
4. *Old order changeth yielding place to new.*
5. *'Tis better to have loved and lost,*
   Than never to have loved at all.

Word-pictures

Tennyson is a great painter of word-pictures. With the exception of Keats and Shakespeare, no other English poet has given us so many, such gorgeous, and such vivid word-pictures as Tennyson. As **E. Albert** puts it, "his method is to seize upon appropriate details, dress them in expressive and musical phrases, and thus throw a glistening image before the readers' eyes". Says **Hadow**, "There is no English poet who can set before us more clearly and more concisely the essential features of a scene or landscape". How wonderful is the following,

And at their feet the crocus brake like fire,

or this from *Ulysses*,

Through scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea ;

or this, from *The Eagle*, a marvellous example of the effect wrought by two words,

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls.

And not only do these lines make us actually see the thing presented ; they do it in a couple of strokes. "An apt word, a well-chosen epithet, an illuminating simile, and the picture is made. That is the method of true art, and it is a method of which every page in Tennyson will furnish an illustration."

Sense of Colour : Sensuous Epithets

Closely connected with his skill in word-painting is his power of indicating colour. The first stanza of *St Agnes' Eve* is like a snow-field, one pure expanse of dazzling whiteness ; the description of the Island of Shallott is as gray as twilight ; that of the Isle of Fruits in *Maeldune* is a riot of gorgeous hues. "And observe, this owes hardly anything to the actual use of colour-words ; it is far subtler in

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conception and workmanship ; we are hardly conscious of the means —the rhythm, the picture, the choice of sounds—the effect rises and fills our eyes as though it were some spontaneous growth of nature. Grant that this is a device easily misused, that in weaker hands it may degenerate into, 'poems written with a paint-brush' ; it yields nothing but beauty in a master who can treat it with such true imagination and such unerring self-restraint."

Tennyson has a Keats-like power of using telling and sensuous words and phrases, which give us at a flash, as it were, a complete picture. For example : *crisping ripples, slumber's holy balm, thick-twined vine, creamy spray, dewy echoes, mildminded melancholy, spicy downs, wallowing monster,* (**Lotos-Eaters**) ; *scudding drifts, ringing plains, windy Troy, the sounding furrows* (in **Ulysses**) ; *and many towered Camelot, willows whiten, willow-veiled, ambling pad, bearded meteor, willowy hills, gleaming shape* (in **The Lady of Shallott**.

His Imagery : Its Originality

As **G.C. Macauley** points out, Tennyson's use of simile and metaphor is characterised by originality and aptness. He avoids the use of stock and hackneyed figures of speech ; his imagery is highly original, and individual, and it seems to vivify a scene and present it to the imagination of the reader. How picturesque and illuminating is the imagery used in the following :

(1) *To dream and dream, like yonder amber light*
Which will not leave the myrh-bush on the height

(2) *The great brand*
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shook
By night, with noises of the northern sea.

As regards their individual and personal character, Tennyson's similes in many cases "do not so much appeal to common experience, as bring before us some special thing or some peculiar aspect of nature, which the poet has vividly present to his own mind, while to the reader perhaps the picture suggested may be quite unfamiliar." As example we may take the following from *Enoch Arden* :

So now that shadow of mischance appear'd
No graver than as when some little cloud
Cuts off the fiery highway of the sun,
And isles alight in the offing.

A remarkable instance of this originality occurs in *Gareth and Lynette* :

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Gareth lookt and read
In letters like to those the vexillary
Hath left crag-carven o'er the streaming Gelt.

the Gelt being a small stream in Cumberland, not named in any of the ordinary gazetteers or atlases ; and the reference is to an inscription on a limestone rock near this stream.

Avoidance of the Commonplace

Another characteristic of Tennyson's diction and style is his avoidance of the commonplace. He not only rigidly excludes all commonplace, stock epithets and stopgap phrases, but often, where other writers would use some familiar, well-worn word, he selects one less known but equally true and expressive. "He has a distinct fondness for good old Saxon words and expressions ; and has helped to rescue many of these from undeserved oblivion." Thus, for the "skinflint" of common use he substitutes the "flay-flint", in place of, "blindman's buff" he uses the older "hoodman blind" (*In Memoriam*); for, "village and cowshed", he writes, "thorpe and byre." Occasionally, he prefers a word of his own coinage, as tonguester, selfless, etc. This tendency to avoid the commonplace is noticeable not only in separate words, but in the rendering of ideas, a poetic dress being given to prosic details by a kind of stately circumlocution ; thus in *The Princess* the hero's northern birthplace is indicated by his telling us that, "on my cradle shone the Northern star" ; and, in the same poem, the blue smoke rising from household chimneys is described as "azure pillars of the hearth"—an expression which **P. M. Wallace,** in his edition of *The Princess,* aptly calls, "almost reverent" ; icebergs are, "moving isles of winter" ; while to picture the hour before the planet Venus had sunk into the sea, the poet writes :

Before the crimson-circled star
Had fall'n into her father's grave.

Repetition and Assonance

Another leading characteristic of Tennyson's style is the repetition of a word (often in a modified form) in the same or sometimes in a slightly different sense. We have, for instance :

Whereat the novice crying, with clasp'd hands,
Shame on her own garrulity, garrulously

and in the same poem,

The maiden passion for a maid

to which we may add :

For ever climbing up the climbing wave

Such repetition is so frequent that it becomes a mannerism and has been criticised as such. *Assonance—the repetition not of a word but*

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of a sound—is also a favourite device with Tennyson for giving a kind of epigrammatic force to a statement, as in,

(*a*) *Even to tipmost lance and topmost helm*

(*b*) *Then with that friendly, friendly smile of his*

His Music and Melody

Tennyson had the unique gift of making the sound of his words fit the sense. The sound of his words often echoes the sense. For example in the following,

The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery rock that rang,
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels.

we see the black rock, we hear the clang of steel, and at just the right moment a flash or wet surface flies across the line and the picture is complete. Not less remarkable is,

The day long wanes ; the slow moon climbs ; the deep
Moans round with many voices,

with its long monosyllables and its deliberately halting rhythm. "There is nothing here which can be called a device, no conscious effort, no appearance of deliberation or selection : he seems but to say the simplest thing in the simplest words, yet no melody of Beethoven, shining after a passion of storm, could give us the feeling of a more intimate and personal relief."

Ways in which It Is Created

Tennyson is one of the most musical of English poets. Music and melody is created by the skilful use of snorous and musical words, alliteration, concentration of vowel sounds by using monosyllabic words, and the use of liquid consonants '*l*', '*m*', and '*n*'. Examples of melodious lines are to be found spread at large on every page of Tennyson's poetry. For example, in the following music is created by the clever use of vowel sounds.

So all day long the noise of battle rolled,
Among the mountains by the winter sea.

Equally skilful is his use of alliteration and liquid consonants. No man ever knew better the value of alliteration, and the still greater value of contrast and interchange. The following, for instance, is a perfectly wrought melody produced by the use of liquid consonants :

A land of old, upheaven from the abyss
By fire, to sink into the abyss again,
Where fragments of forgotten peoples dwelt ;

and here is another of the same kind, though in a different strain :

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The splendour falls an castle walls
And snowy summits old in story ;
The long light shakes across the lakes,
And the wild cataract leaps in glory.

It would be no more possible to alter a word in either of these lines than to alter a note in one of the great tunes of Schubert or Mozart. Says **Wallace** "*In no English poet, perhaps only in Homer and Virgil, is the kinship of poetry and music so evident is in Tennyson.*"

Versification

Tennyson was a great metrical artist who experimented with, and used with complete mastery, a number of metres and verse forms. Even in the early volume of 1830, every variety of rhythm and metre has been used successfully, showing that the poet has already mastered the principles of English prosody. In the volume of 1842, the poet shows greater dexterity in the use of the chosen metre. For example, *The Lady of Shallott* is the triumph of metrical art. The entire poem is written in a stanza of seven lines, the first four all with the same rhyme-ending, and a refrain after the third and fourth lines. It is a difficult metre but Tennyson has handled it with great success. In *The Lotos-Eaters* the skill of the poet has further matured. The introductory lines are in the Spenserian stanza which, according to **Auden**, has not been handled with equal skill by any one else since Spenser '*The Choric Song*' is written in iambic lines which vary in length between three feet and seven feet. The rhythm is considerably manipulated by the inversion of iambics into troches, and is adapted successfully to the fluctuating emotions of the theme. The movement of the lines is in conformity with the thoughts of the mariners. *In adjusting thought and emotion to the rhythm of the lines, Tennyson shows his skill as a metrical artist.*

In *In Memoriam* Tennyson perfected the stanza of four iambic lines of four feet each with enclosed rhymes (*a b ba*). His use of this difficult stanza is eminently successful. "*Tennyson succeeded in giving it such variation as was necessary by adapting it to the changing moods of his poem, by a skilful use of vowel music and alliteration ; by occasional inversion of rhythm, by running of sense over from line to line, even from stanza to stanza, and other such devices.*"

Blank Verse

Tennyson used blank verse in *The Princess*, *the Idylls of the King*, and the *English Idylls*. "*His use of Blank verse,*" says **Wallace**, "*while less powerful than Milton's at his best, always remains at a high level of excellence, and its simple grandeur of style and expression is peculiarly his own.*" His blank verse is skilfully varied

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according to the requirements of thought and emotion. Various devices are used to impart variety :

(1) The first syllable or half foot of a line of blank verse is often accented and cut off from the rest of the line by a pause, to indicate some sudden emphatic action or startling sight or sound, breaking the flow of the narrative—an effect often employed by Homer. For example,

(*a*) *His arms*
Clash'd : and the sound was good to Gareth's ear charm'd, till
Sir Kay, the senseschal, would come.

(*b*) *Skock, that a man far-off might well perceive.*

(2) Action rapidly repeated is represented by an unusual number of unaccented syllables in one line. Thus we almost hear the huddling flow of waters in such lines as,

Myriads of rivulets hurrying thro' the lawn

The rapid warble of song-birds sounds through,

Melody on branch and melody in mid-air

and in the following, the quick beat of a horse's hoof is echoed,

The sound of many a heavily galloping hoof

(3) A Majestic effect is produced in the following lines by the sustained rhythm and the broad vowel sounds :

(*a*) *By the long wash of Australasian seas*

(*b*) *The league-long roller thundering on the reef*

(4) Variations from the usual iambic regularity of blank verse, attained by placing the accent on the first instead of on the second half-foot, are introduced, often to represent intermittent action, as in,

Down the long tower-stairs, hesitating.

His Lyrics : Their Flexibility

Tennyson's mastery over rhythm and metre is seen even to better advantage in his lyrics. "*Beneath his hand the tiniest lyric stanza unfolds, the stiffest metre becomes flexible.*" Think for a moment of the rigid ten syllable lines of Pope, and turn for contrast to,

Camelot, a city of shadowy palaces ;
Where fall not hail or rain or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly ; but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea ;

"No doubt much of this may be due to artifice ; it may fall below the spontaneity of Wordsworth or the untrained luxuriance of

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Keats ; but surely artifice was never employed in a cause more noble or with a skill more consummate". And the same is true of his structural forms ; the lyric perfection of *The Bugle Song*, the funeral-march of *The Ode on Wellington*, the magnificent swing and cadence of *The Revenge*. "Grant that it be, as Browning said of all poetry, 'Art in obedience to laws', yet the obedience is that of a freeman and the laws are based on the very foundation of our human nature. So long as pure beauty has power to move, so long as it draws its materials from tone and rhythm and its principles from a wise organisation and control, so long will Tennyson take high rank among the great craftsmen of language."

Conclusion

As **Cazamian** points out, Tennyson was the heir to the romantic tradition, and he completes and corrects it by incorporating in it the essential tenets of classicism. *In his poetry romanticism finds its balance, and its excesses are corrected and modified by the painstaking efforts of a sincere artist.* Estimating his greatness as a poetic artist **Saintsbury** writes, "Tennyson added to English poetry a body of work, which, though falling short of Chaucer and Coleridge in fresh and original gift, of Spenser in uniform excellence and grasp of a huge subject, of Shakespeare in universality, in height and depth, of Milton in grandeur and lovely sublimity ; of Wordsworth in ethical weight and grip of nature behind the veil, of Shelley in unearthliness, and of Keats in voluptuous spontaneity, yet deserves to be ranked with the best of these, except Shakespeare only, in virtue of its astonishing display of poetic art." **Compton-rickett's** praise of his art is equally eloquent : "of Tennyson's work as a literary artist, and as a painter of English life, no lover of beautiful verse could speak too highly. As a word painter of typical English scenery, as the exponent of the simple emotions of everybody life, he holds a treasured and honourable place. His delicacy and crystalline charm, his dignified and melodious utterance, will always endear him to English men and women."

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11

Treatment of Love in Tennyson's Poetry

Or

Tennyson as a Poet of Love and Marriage

Or

The Woman in Tennyson's Poetry

His Originality and Uniqueness

Love has always been the theme of poetry ; love has inspired some of the greatest poetry of the world. In the English language, Shakespeare, Donne, Shelley, Byron, Browning, etc., are some of the greatest of love-poets. Tennyson is also a great love-poet, and his treatment of love is unique in many ways. He is primarily and mainly a poet of conjugal love. As **Compton-Rickett** points out, *"Tennyson elected to treat of love, not with Byron as an elemental force, or with Shelley and Browning as a transcendental passion, or with Rossetti as a mystic mingling of sense and spirit, but as a domestic sentiment."*

Domestic Love : Its Glorification

In his treatment of love and sex-relationship Tennyson is a typical Victorian. The Victorians had to effect a compromise between the unprecedented licentiousness of the previous age, and the Christian ascetic ideal of the complete negation of sex. Sex was a fact and they could not shut their eyes to it. Moreover, it was necessary that the British race should be propogated, so they affected a compromise, elevated the biological necessity of propogation into a moral virtue, and evolved the ideal of domestic love and marriage. *Tennyson in his poetry glorified domestic love ; he cast over it the glow of romance.* As **Horton** in his biography of the poet points out, "It was to be not the least of his lessons to his time, that Tennyson

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from the first saw Paradise regained not in a monastry, but in a home.....Tennyson flung the light of romance over the familiar, and the home shone with unearthly radiance." Writing about Tennyson's poem *The Miller's Daughter*, *Stopford.* **A. Brooke** says, "*The Miller's Daughter* is a simple story of true sweethearting and married love but raised.....into a steady and grave emotion worthy of a love built to last for life betwixt a man and woman. This was the sort of love for which Tennyson cared, for which Byron and Shelley did not care, which was not at all in the world where Keats lived."

Conception of Love : Spiritual and Not Physical

It is married love which Tennyson extols ; he has no use for passion which is not sublimated into conjugal love. Tennyson's treatment of love is not only manly ; it is also eminently wholesome. He placed high value on law and order, on discipline and self-control, and his conception of love is but an expression of his emphasis on law and self-control. It may be that he himself was not exposed to physical temptation, or it may have been that he suppressed the animal within him. However it may have been, there is no denying the fact that Tennyson concentrates very firmly upon the advantages of spiritual as opposed to physical love. Again and again he advises his readers to,

Arise and fly
The reeling Faun, the sensual beast ;
Move upward, working out the beast,
And let the ape and tiger die.

Emphasis on Domestic Virtues

It was not only his abhorrence of physical passion, his immunity from, or his control over, the coarser instincts of the male, which rendered Tennyson so naturally and so pre-eminently the poet of the domestic virtues. He possessed another quality ; he possessed an almost feminine sympathy for the tender delicacies of the home. It was painful for him to contemplate even the possibility of any relation between man and woman other than the conjugal. He insists on conjugal fidelity. The "*shadows of the world,*" the reflection of which so distressed the Lady of Shalott, included, it is true, "two young lovers" walking together in the moon-light ; but we are at once reassured by the statement that these two lovers were, "lately wed." The maiden who, in *The Princess*, is invited to find love in the valley, is guaranteed at the same time that she will be soothed on arrival by "the azure pillars of the hearth." More curious even is the ultimate fate of Oenone, who, although for sixty years she was allowed to wander as a gentle little pagan among the respectable English couples with whom Tennyson peopled his intervening poems, was in the end caught and married, somewhat posthumously, to

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Paris, who, whatever his subsequent extravagences, had, after all, been, "once her playmate on the hills".

Condemnation of Illicit Love

Tennyson has no use for illicit love, however intense and true it may be. It is regarded as an evil, as a source of much mischief. In *The Idylls of the King*, it is the guilty love of Launcelot and Gunivere which results in the death of Arthur and the dissolution of the Round Table. Often domesticity becomes an obsession with Tennyson. Says **Harold Nicolson,** *"It is curious, for instance, to observe how constantly, in his abhorrence of the illicit, he throws a domestic atmosphere even over the preconjugal relations of his characters."* The young men and women of Tennyson's stories are rarely allowed even the legitimate adventure of selection : they are pledged to each other from their childhood In almost every case they are either closely related or have played as man and wife together in the nursery. "When Harry and I were children, he call'd me his own little wife", such, more or less, is the prelude to nine out of ten of all Tennyson's love-poems "And for this purpose—for the purpose, that is, of giving a tender and wholly spiritual savour to his love-stories—the device works well enough".

Passion : Physical and Sensual

However, Tennyson's idealisation of domestic love does not mean that passion and the ecstasy of passion are entirely absent from his poetry. There are poems in which passion leaps out with all its intensity. Thus in *Fatima* the expression of love is passionate, physical and sensual :

Last night, when some one spoke his name,
From my swift blood that went and came
A thousand, little shafts of flame
Were shiver'd in my narrow frame.
O Love, O fire ! once he drew
With one long kiss my whole soul thro,
My lips, as sunlight drinketh dew.

In the *Gardener's Daughter,* the lips of the girl are so red and warm that the sun doubles its warmth by dwelling upon them.

Sex and Marriage : Victorian Prudery

Tennyson is a great love poet, he has left behind him love-poetry of significance, but he would have been even a greater love-poet, had he aimed at some adequate reality of the emotion, and had he not been hampered by the Victorian prudery on the question of sex and marriage. The whole of the woman's question is discussed by him in detail in *The Princess,* but he fails to give us any inspiring or original theory of marriage. He realises that the Victorian

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attitude towards womanhood and the relationship of the sexes is illogical and is based on fallacies, yet he subscribes to it and propagates it in *The Princess* and a host of other poems.

Attitude Towards Womanhood

His attitude towards womanhood is typically Victorian and conventional. The woman's place was the hearth ; all outside interests and ambitions were ridiculous and, what was more, pretentious : nature had ordained otherwise :

Man for the field and woman for the hearth ;
Man for the sword and for the needle she ;
Man with the head and woman with the heart ;
Man to command and woman to obey ;
All else confusion.

It was a dishonest and selfish theory evolved by man for the greater comfort and satisfaction of his own sex. Marriage was the be-all and end-all of life for woman, and if she was ever inclined to question this arrangement she is advised to repeat to herself, "*I cannot understand, I love*".

Tennyson's Heroines

Princess *Ida* in *The Princess* is a woman made of, "sterner stuff", she at last works out a plan for man's emancipation and tries to put it into practice. But she stands alone among Tennyson's women. His other women are weak and delicate, truly feminine according to Victorian standards.

Says **Hugh Walker** in this connection, "The delicately fanciful portraits of maidens in the early poems are all touched with romance of a somewhat dilettante sort. The very names, Claribel, Marina, Oriana, Madeline, Rosalind, Fatima, are redolent of romance. But these "airy fairy", "ever varying", "faintly smiling" or "rare pale" damsels are all shadowy and unreal ; they are not, "for human nature's daily food" ; they themselves have not been nourished on such food, they have fed on honeydew and drunk the milk of Paradise. They would not stand the wear and tear of life. The only thing possible is to set them apart, like china ornaments on a bracket or in a cupboard. The women in his later poetry are equally dainty, equally the creatures of a world of romance, and equally unfit to face the harsh reality of life."

The ideal Tennysonian heroine is high born, she is simple, and she is also meek, gentle and long suffering. The *Lady of Shallott*, for example, is high born and she suffers quietly the curse that is on her. For Tennyson, as for the Victorians,

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A simple maiden in her flower,
Is worth a hundred coats of arms.

An ideal woman must be meek as is the wife of Lord Burleigh, who,

Shaped her mind with woman's meekness,
To all duties of her rank ;
And a gentle consort made he,
And her gentle mind was such,
That she grew a noble lady,
And the people loved her much.

———

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12

A General Estimate of Tennyson as a Poet

Or

Tennyson's Poetry : Its Merits and Demerits

Or

Tennyson's Greatness as a Poet : His Place

In order to form a correct estimate of Tennyson as a poet, we must consider him as (*a*) a representative poet, (*b*) an artist, (*c*) a poet of nature, and (*d*) a thinker.

A Great Representative Poet

Tennyson is a representative poet, one who represents his age not in fragments but completely, in all its manifold variety and complexity. According to **Hudson**, he was to Victorian England what three centuries earlier Spenser was to the England of Elizabeth, and much that is most deeply characteristic of the Victorian spirit entered into the texture of his writings. As **Stopford Brooke** has said : "For more than sixty years he lived close to the present life of England, as far as he was capable of comprehending and sympathising with its movements ; and he inwove what he felt concerning it into his poetry." The extraordinary diversity of his work is itself typical of the immense complexity of his age. "He wrote on classical, romantic, and modern subjects ; on subjects taken from humble and rustic life ; on English history and Celtic legend ; on the deepest problems of philosophy and religion ; and the range of his method and style is scarcely less remarkable than that of his matter."

But even more typical are the content and quality of his poems. His *Locksley Hall*, 1842, is full of the restless spirit of 'young England' and of its faith in science, commerce, and the progress of mankind ; while its sequel, *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*, 1886,

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shows the revulsion of feeling which had occurred in many minds when the rapid development of science seemed to threaten the very foundations of religion, and commerce was filling the world with materialistic greed. In *The Princess* the poet grapples with one of the rising questions of the day—that of the higher education of women and their place in the fast-changing conditions of modern society ; *Maud* quivers with the patriotic passion of the time of the Crimean War and with the general ferment which followed this war. It also reflects the Mamon worship of the day. In *the Idylls of the King*, while the medieval machinery is retained, the old story is turned into a parable the lessons of which have a direct bearing upon contemporary life. "The change which Tennyson's thought underwent in regard to social and political questions itself reveals his curious sensitiveness to the tendencies of his time ; for the sanguine temper of his early manhood, the doubts, misgivings, and reactionary utterances of his middle age, and the chastened hopefulness of his last years, are alike reflections of the successive moods which were widely characteristic of his generation. But politically and socially he stands out as, on the whole, the poetic exponent of the cautious spirit of Victorian liberalism" (**Hudson**).

Tennyson was essentially the poet of law and order as well as of progress ; he held tenaciously to the great heritage of English tradition ; and while he firmly believed that in the divine scheme of things,

The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

he was quite as firmly opposed to, 'raw haste', rash experiments, and everything that savoured of revolution. "*Tennyson's poetry is often the vehicle of the spreading democratic sympathies of Victorian England.*" Recluse and aristocrat as he was, he was profoundly interested in common people and common things ; and it is not the least significant feature of his work as a whole that along with *The Princess, Maud, the Idylls of the King*, it contains such things as *The May Queen, Enoch Arden* and *Dora* (**Hudson**).

While, however, Tennyson's poetry is thus historically interesting as reflecting the social and political trends of his age, it is even more important as a record of the intellectual and spiritual life of the time. A careful student of science and philosophy, he was deeply impressed by the far-reaching meaning of the new discoveries and speculations by which the edifice of the old thought was being undermined. More especially was he impressed by the wide implications of the doctrine of evolution. "At once sceptical and mystical in his own temper, he was peculiarly fitted to become the mouth-piece of his century's doubts, difficulties, and craving for the certainties of religious faith." He represents the Victorian spirit of compromise when he writes :

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Let knowledge grow from more to more
But more of reverence in us dwell.

The 'two voices'—science and religion—of that century are perpetually heard in his work ; in *In Memoriam*, more than in any other contemporary piece or verse or prose, we may read of the great conflict of the age between doubt and faith ; while in many later poems, as in *The Ancient Sage*, we may see how the poet challenged the current materialism and asserted the eternal verities of God and immortality.

His Greatness as an Artist—Some Limitations

Tennyson is a great representative poet, but he is still greater as an artist. He was a most careful writer, revising what he had written again and again. Among the elements which make up his art, the following may be mentioned : (*a*) "A minute observation of Nature, which furnished him with a store of poetic description and imagery ; (*b*) a scholarly appreciation of all that is most picturesque in the literature of the past, (*c*) an exquisite precision in the use of words and phrases ; (*d*) the picturesqueness and aptness of his similes, (*e*) an avoidance of the commonplace (by the use of clever, round about-expressions), (*f*) his use of repetition and assonance, (*g*) the expressive harmonies of his rhythm, and (*h*) the subtle melody of his diction.

Praising Tennyson as a literary artist **Albert** writes, "No one excels Tennyson in the deft application of sound to sense and in the subtle and prevading employment of alliteration and vowel-music". Such passages as this abound in his work :

Myriads of rivulets hurrying thro' the lawn,
The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
And murmuring of innumerable bees

This is perhaps not the highest poetry, but shows only a kind of manual, or rather aural, dexterity ; yet as Tennyson employes it, it is effective to a degree. "His excellent craftsmanship is also apparent in his handling of English metres, in which he is a tireless experimenter. *In blank verse he is not so varied and powerful as Shakespeare, nor so majestical as Milton, but in the skill of his workmanship and in his wealth of diction he falls but little short of these great masters.*"

In his word-painting, Tennyson follows the example of Keats. Nearly all Tennyson's poems, even the simplest, abound in ornate description of natural and other scenes. "His method is to seize upon appropriate details, dress them in expressive and musical phrases, and thus throw a glistening image before the reader's eye." Such ornate descriptions reveal Tennyson at his best ; but once again the doubt arises as to whether they represent the highest poetry. They show exactness of observation and a rare loveliness of epithet; but they lack the intense insight, the ringing, romantic note, of the best efforts of Keats.

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His Originality as a Nature Poet

Tennyson is a great and original nature poet, and in his nature-poetry the impact on him of contemporary science can best be studied. It is seen in the minuteness and exactness of his obrevation. His attitude to Nature is not that of Wordsworth. His view of Nature is that of science—that Nature is full of the brutal struggle for existence. He finds her, "red in tooth and claw". He does not paint her as a kindly mother. Looking at Nature the poet does not find any evidence to support the human faith in the immortality of the soul. This is his argument in his masterpiece, *In Memoriam*. But as an artist he makes excellent use of Nature as a background to human action. He knew how to relate the natural background to the mood of a lyric or a longer poem. *The Lotus Eaters* is the best example of interior landscape-painting. The poem displays his unrivalled powers of observation. Tennyson is simply superb in using nature to intensify human moods. His skill in landscape painting is remarkable ; The whole landscape is vivified through a few apt touches.

A Great Lyric Poet—Limitations

Modern critics believe that the best of Tennyson is not to be found in his longer and more ambitious poems, but in his lyrics. "The typical Tennysonian lyric is the lyric of mood—a poem in which what is expressed is not a simple feeling but a complex mood, which is rendered in terms of a natural setting" Tennyson wrote lyrics of many kinds. *In Memoriam* is a long elegy composed of many short lyrics. The elegy was peculiarly suited to Tennyson's melancholy and reflective temper. In *In Memoriam*, an elegy which was inspired by the death of his friend Henry Hallam, Tennyson deals with all the phases of his personal grief and sorrow, discusses the conflict between knowledge or science on the one side and faith on the other, and traces his gradual recovery of faith. Tennyson also wrote a number of lyrical poems dealing with classical subjects. *Tithonus* is an example. The poem is not quite dramatic—it reveals a feeling rather than a character. His patriotic lyrics also deserve mention, some of which are popular in England even to day. Though some of his lyrics as *Break, Break, Break* ; *Crossing the Bar*, and the songs in *The Princess*, are musical and attractive, and truly great, yet says **Albert**, *"on the whole his genius was too self-conscious and his life too regular and prosperous to provide a background for the true lyrical intensity of emotion."*

Not a Great Poet of Man

While Tennyson is really great as a nature-poet, he has less power of dealing with men and women, or with the passions. He deals with types rather than with individuals. Says **Hadow**, "He describes his own Lincolnshire country-folk with close sympathy, and with the humour that is born of sympathy ; outside their limit he is little able to depict characters and tempers that are different from his

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own. All his best men are of one pattern—noble, courteous, chivalrous, a little deficient in force and passion, yet bold in adventure and temperate in success ; the pattern, in short, of just such an English gentleman as Tennyson himself was. His women are hardly ever clearly seen—they are either mere sketches or pictures of which the features are incongruous". That is one of the reasons why he failed in drama. He is too self-centred, too lyric, to give his *dramatic personae* a free hand ; he makes them say not what they mean, but what he means.

As a poet of man, he concentrates the noblest of English manhood into one supreme type. That a man should love truth, country, and freedom, that he should serve God and his lady, that he should reverence all womanhood and be tender to all weakness, that he should strike his blow for the right and care nothing for reward,—these were the laws of his Round Table, these are his principles of government. No doubt, "There are depths of feeling that he has not sounded, there are whole tracts of human life which he has not explored ; but within the boundaries of his own realm he has set up for ever the example of staunch and fearless loyalty to a high ideal" **(Hadow)**. He is the poet of Man, but not of men.

His Weakness as a Thinker

As a thinker, Tennyson lacks originality and depth. His thought is puerile, and it is this aspect of his poetry which has done the greatest harm to his reputation. According to **Compton-Rickett,** *'No poet was more exercised by religious problems than he ; and no poet was more sensitive to scientific thought than he."* His attitude is one of compromise between science and religion. From *In Memoriam* we can gather much about his views on God, the immortality of the Soul, and the governance of the universe. He has a firm faith in the supremacy of law and order which he finds at work throughout Nature. His poetry is essentially religious in temper, and he, "has a faith in God and His love and goodness which shines, like a clear and quiet flame in his poetry." Occasionaly, he may be beset with despair and doubts, but always, ultimately, he returns to his faith in, "one far off divine event, to which the whole creation moves." *But there is little definition and little sound theorising, and often he is inconsistant and uncertain.*

Conclusion : His Real Greatness

Tennyson has expressed himself on various matters, political, social, religious and ethical, but his philosophy is neither great nor inspiring. *To-day, he is valued not as a thinker, but as a consummate literary artist.* Says **Hadow,** "No poet ever understood more fully the 'glory of words' : none has sounded a music more rich, more varied, more pure in style, more beautiful in colour and tone. To study him is to learn the possibilities of our native speech : to love

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him is an artistic education." To his contemporaries he was a demigod ; but younger men strongly assailed his patent literary mannerisms, his complacent acceptance of the evils of his time, his flattery of the great, and his somewhat arrogant assumption of the airs of immortality. Consequently, for twenty years after his death his reputation suffered considerably. Once more reaction has set in, this time in his favour, and his detractors have modified their attitude. His many merits are now being better appreciated. "*He is not a supreme poet ; and whether he will maintain the primacy among the singers of his own generation, as he undoubtedly did during his lifetime, remains to be seen ; but, after all deductions are made, his high place in the Temple of Fame is assured*" **(E. Albert)**

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13

Reaction Against Tennyson

Or

The Reputation of Tennyson

Or

Tennyson's Popularity

Or

Tennyson : His Limitations and Shortcomings

The Reaction against Tennyson

In his own day, Tennyson's popularity amounted almost to hero-worship. "For full half-century," says **Long,** "he was the voice of England, loved and honoured as a man and a poet, not simply by a few discerning critics, but by a whole people." He was immensely popular at the time of his death ; his weaknesses were not recognised, and he was rather-liked because of them. It was only at the turn of the century that the reaction began. First, it was confined to a few discerning critics, then it spread and grew more and more intense, till to care for his poetry came to be regarded as old fashioned, and to belittle it as a sign of taste and discernment. The pendulum swung to the other extreme, and even his many excellencies came to be regarded with supreme indifference or contempt.

Its Reasons (*a*) Out-dated Ideas

This reaction against Tennyson was by no means wholly unjustified. There are certain features of his poetry which justify it. First he is a Victorian poet, and this is his strength, as well as his weakness. His ideas have grown out-dated and they do not appeal to a new generation in a new age. As **Bradley** puts it, "every generation naturally asks for novelty ; and, further, the ideas and the literature of times immediately preceding its own are

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apt to be the least interesting of all to it, because they have less novelty for it than those of periods more distant, and may even be felt, as those more distant ideas are not, to be a prison from which it is necessary to escape. This, no doubt, is a wise provision of Nature to ensure progress, and it would be foolish to complain of it, even though its result is that the full meaning of the ideas in question is lost for a time and remains to be re-discovered when they are no longer familiar".

(*b*) His Poverty as a Thinker

Further, Tennyson was a poet, and not a philosopher, but he uses his poetry as a vehicle for the expression of his views on God, religion, and the immortality of the soul. Instead of merely expressing his ideas with the emotions accompanying them, he argues about them and tries to systematise them, and fails in the attempt. Neither is there any originality about his ideas. What he says had already been said more precisely and forcefully by far more competent thinkers.

(*c*) Argumentative Tone of His Poetry

Again, as **Bradley** tells us, some of his poetry is touched with the spirit of ephemeral controversy. The advance of contemporary science, the theories of Darwin, more specially, fully revealed to him the conflict, pain, and waste that is in nature, the brutal struggle for existence that rages within her. This meant, in other words, that there is evil and ugliness not in man alone, but also in God, that the ultimate power is not wholly good and beautiful, as has been supposed by conventional Christianity. Hence the doubts and uncertainties of *In Memoriam*, hence the need again and again to re-assert his faith in the face of the mounting tide of materialism. *Hence arises the argumentative and polemic tone of his religious poetry.* This accounts also for the reputation of the philosopher-teacher which he acquired, which his un-wise admirers stressed, and which blinded many to his real excellence. This has caused the greatest damage to Tennyson's reputation. *In Memoriam*, for example, is a great work of art, it expresses the hopes and aspirations, doubts and fears, which are universal, and have been the subject of the greatest poetry. But all this is over-looked, in the general condemnation of the "philosophy" of the poet.

(*d*) Conventional Morality ; Prudery

In his morality and ethics also Tennyson is conventional as well as out-dated. His attitude towards sex is characterised by the Victorian prudery. We do not get in him any free and frank treatment of sex. There is nothing startling or arresting about his ethics. The virtues that he cared for are mainly of one type : self-control, self-sacrifice, faithfulness, loyalty to law and to obligations, personal and social. Faith in order and law is inherent his scheme

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of life ; where there is clash between love and duty, love must give way. Obviously, there is nothing arresting about such ideas, and they do not resemble the ideas which acquired popularity with the opening of the new century. The idea, for example, that the business of life is to develop one's individuality is foreign to Tennyson ; equally foreign to him is the modern view of life as an adventure. Hence it is that he has come to be regarded as a dated poet, and his popularity has accordingly suffered.

(*e*) Failure in Characterisation

Tennyson's genius was essentially lyrical, but increasingly he devoted his attention to long narrative poems. In his own day *The Idylls of the King* was immensely popular, and did much to enhance his reputation as a poet. But with the passing of time the *Idylls* have caused the greatest damage to his reputation. *This is so because they reveal many of the faults and shortcomings of the poet.* They have countless beautiful passages, but as a whole they fail to satisfy. In the morality and the allegory there is nothing new and original, and the *Idylls* fails in the delineation of human character. Says **Bradley**, "It fails to do so, I think, because Tennyson had not in any marked degree that universal interest in human natnre, that penetrating insight into it, or that power of portraying it in uniquely individual forms, which belonged in different degrees to Shakespeare and to Browning." On what may be called the metaphysical or mystical side his mind was not simple, but in regard to human character it was. He could express perfectly, certain feelings and moods, even passionate ones. He could depict admirably, in later years, such typical figures as the Grandmother and the Northern Former. "But that is not enough for a long and wholly serious narrative, and it could not suffice for *the Iylls* where the characters were to be modernized, and where, if the story was to have the effect of tragedy, it was especially important that the leading characters should be intensely imagined and thoroughly individual. This they are far from being " Even Lancelot fails to impress, Gunevere is thin and shadowy, and Arthur, except in *The Passing of Arthur*, remains a mere abstraction. This failure in characterisation, as well as their looseness in construction, has been pounced upon by critics and exposed threadbare.

(*f*) Some Faults of Style

Tennyson's style also has certain glaring faults. More often than not, at least in his longer poems, his style suffers from elaborateness or over-ornamentation. Tennyson rarely, "pipes but as the linnets sing." He does not attain the artless air, say of the Elizabethan lyricists, and his style does never attain, "the bare, trenchent force," which Wordsworth and Byron could so often attain. In a good deal of his non-lyrical poetry, in most of his long narrative poems, his art degnerates into artifice, "and there is much glossy polish, or irrelevant jewellery." In other words, his narrative

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poetry is elaborate in a way or a degree that is faulty. He is often mannered. In the later *Idylls*, says **Bradley**, *"one is conscious of effort and artifice, and often of the mannerism to which they led."*

(g) His Romanticism : Its Weakness

There were two strains of the romantic movement : "the first, the more strictly 'romantic', best represented by Coleridge and Keats, with its love of picture and colour, the marvellous or mysterious, the far-away in time or place ; the other, sometimes called naturalistic, of which Wordsworth, waiting of the peasant around him, was the great exponent." Tennyson united these two strains more completely than any of his predecessors. Often he could do so successfully as in *The Lady of Shallot*, *The Lotos-Eaters*, *Mariana More D' Arthur*, etc. But, at other times he failed. Sometimes, he took his subject from the past and tried to modernise it, at other times, he treated of contemporary subjects and problems, but tried to throw over them the romantic glow of a by-gone age. He often failed, and the mixture of the old and the new, the modern and the medieval, is incongruous and strikes a jarring note. The old stories of Arthur's death and of the Sleeping Beauty enchanted him ; but when he re-told them he added Prologues and Epilogues which show his intention to modernize ; and his Lotos-Eaters and Ulysses were certainly not meant to be those of Homer. "It was not till he came to write *The Idylls of the King* that the danger of this tendency became pressing, but in an inverted form it may also be seen in *The Princess*, where he tries to put a present-day or future-day problem into surroundings that belong to no earthly place or time" **(Bradley)**.

Conclusion

Such are Tennyson's limitations, and they are at the root of the reaction against him. Over-estimation is bound to result in a reaction equally extreme, and it was so in the case of Tennyson as well. The reading public was blinded to his greatness as an artist in the use of words, to the music and melody of his poetry, and to the precision, accuracy, and vividness of his nature-poetry. Reaction against this attitude set in early in the present century and to-day there is a more just, sane and balanced estimation of Tennyson's poetry. "To his contemporaries he was a demigod ; but younger men strongly assailed his patent literary mannerisms, his complacent acceptance of the evils of his time, his flattery of the great, and his somewhat arrogant assumption of the airs of immortality. Consequently for twenty years after his death his reputation suffered considerably. Once more reaction has set in, and his detractors have modified their attitude" **(Bradley)**. *He is not a supreme poet ; and whether he will maintain the primacy among the singers of his own generation, as he undoubtedly did during his life time, remains to be seen ; but, after all deductions are made, his high place in the Temple of Fame is assured* **(E. Albert)**.

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14

The Princess : Introduction and Appreciation

The Poem : Its Composition and Source

The Princess, a long narrative poem, was first published in 1847. It was, revised for the edition of 1848, 1850, 1851, and assumed its present form in the edition of 1853.

" 'The Princess', therefore, as we now possess it, is the outcome of careful and sustained effort on the poet's part, the offspring of his mature powers, polished and refined through several Editions, and may thus be fairly regarded as a work upon which its author has bestowed the utmost of his critical afterthought as well as creative power."

(Wallace)

The idea of a women's college may have been suggested to the poet by Margaret Cavendish's *The Female Academy* or by Defoe's essay on the subject. Some have traced its source to a passage in Johnson's *Rasselas*. But, it is much more likely that Tennyson got the idea of a women's college from Shakespeare's *Love's Labour Lost* in which a *Male Academy* is invaded by a group of ladies. The poet has himself called it a '*Medley*', for the poem is a curious mixture of the serious and the comic, the medieval and the modern, of realism and romance and fantasy.

The Story : The Framework

The Princess is a very strange poem indeed. Partly a burlesque, it tells a tale of knights and ladies, quite deliberately fantastic and mock-serious for most of the time. The story itself can be summed up in a few words. Ida, the daughter of King Gama, has founded a university for women. No man is allowed to enter the university, and Ida herself has renounced mankind, including the Prince to whom she was betrothed in infancy. The Prince, who tells the tale, has other ideas. He already loves her picture and expects to love her. His father, angry at Ida's behaviour, tells King Gama that he

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must marry his daugher to his as promised or there will be war. But in the meantime the Prince, with two of his friends, disguised as women, enters the University. The story is medieval but it is set in modern times. *The Prologue* introduces us to a group of seven friends, who are chatting with some ladies. They are happy, the day, 'genial', and the conversation turns on an old story about a warrior princess. To entertain the ladies, the young men make up a story, its subject suggested by this old tale. Each of them is to contribute a chapter of his own, following on where the last narrator leaves off. There are seven sections. We return to the present for the conclusion. So the piece is set within a modern framework, and though the question of women's rights is not discussed directly, it is clear that the old tale is meant to focus upon this contemporary problem.

The Theme

The theme of the poem is *the place, the character* and *the education* of women. The poet's aim is frankly didactic, *i.e.* to focus attention on the woman's question, the burning topic of the day. The agitation for woman's emancipation, for her right to vote and right to education, was at its height at the time, and many extreme views were expressed. There were those who claimed for her complete equality with man. The poet's treatment of the question throughout is characterised by moderation, his aim being to counteract false ideals of womanhood, and put the matter in a true and healthy light. Though the poet is sympathetic, often he seems old fashioned as in the following famous lines :

Man for the field and woman for the hearth
Man for the sword and for the needle she.
Man with the head and woman with the heart
Man to command and woman to obey.

The Woman's Question : Tennyson's Treatment of It

The poem is didactic, but Tennyson, as usual, does not teach his lessons directly. Rather, he clothes them in the form of a romantic story. "The several points specially dwelt upon are the insufficiency of the culture of the intellect alone, the essential diversity between the sexes—diversity in kind, not in degree— and the vanity of any attempt to crush out human impulses and affections" (**Wallace**). These may be really summed up under one head—that Nature can not be thwarted, that attempts to act in defiance of her principles must be either grotesque or tragical in their results, and that true wisdom consists in the organisation of our lives—physical, mental, moral, social, political—in conformity with Nature's eternal laws. These lessons have been worked out by sketching for us the history of a scheme based upon the denial of this principle, and showing us how from the beginning it was doomed to failure. But there is no malice in his treatment—he is tender and generous to the utmost—indeed, he shows

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more enthusiasm in his championship of the feebler cause than on behalf of the triumphant. "The fine character of the Princess, and the essential nobility of the cause which she advocates, are dwelt upon with the most fervent admiration ; and the choicest graces of his language are poured forth in the rehearsal of the beauty of the College and the sumptuousness of its institutions. A noble effort is not to be treated with scorn because misdirected. Earnest work, however mistaken, demands our reverence and sympathy" (**Wallace**).

The Charge of Incoherence and Lack of Unity.

The literary structure of the Poem has often been grossly misunderstood. The work has been charged with, "Want of interest, unity, and purpose," with,"miserable weakness and want of integrity," with being, "indeed a 'medley'" and producing, "an unpleasant grotesque effect," with resting upon, "a basis of wild and extravagent improbabilities," and so forth, in numerous critical essays, contemporary and subsequent, both in England and in America. "How far it is lacking in interest is of course a matter that can only be decided for each reader by himself ; its unity and integrity, both of design and of execution, seem so strikingly clear that it is really hard to see what exact meaning the citics attach to these words ; while the rest of the criticism amounts to no more than that *The Princess* is, in form a Romance, in style and purpose a serio-comic, didactic Poem."

Refutation of the Charge (1) a Romantic Poem

Now, a work that comes before us in the acknowledged character of a Romance is not to be judged by the ordinary critical canons applicable to a historical work, or even to narrative poetry, than is the value of a proposition of Euclid to be estimated by its artistic effect. This essential truth has been so admirably expressed by **Mr. Dawson** : "We should apply to *The Princess* the same rules as to other similar works of imagination or fancy. To do otherwise would be as reasonable as to attempt to extract the square root of a melody, or to ascertain the cubic contents of a collection of love-songs."

(2) The Fusion of the Comic and the Serious

The interfusion of the solemn and the comic elements, so far from being a blot upon the poem, is an eminently artistic feature of the work, deliberately conceived as the most fitting vehicle of a design in which, "the jest and earnest", are inevitably found, "working side by side", throughout. "*In the same way, the general air of incongruity that dominates the whole poem is intended to reflect the fantastic character of the subject matter*" (**Wallace**). That these features of the literary treatment form an integral portion of Tennyson's deliberate purpose is plain from the very commencement. The first

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note is struck in the opening lines of the Prologue, where Sir Walter's house is described as adorned with articles collected from all quarters of the globe and all eras of history,

"Every clime and age
Jumbled together,"

while the serious earnestness of Lilia and the mock-solemnity and bantering chaff of Walter stress the two-fold tone—the comic and the serious—that pervades the main story. More directly is this brought out in the lines with which the first narrator prefaces the commencement of this "Summer's Table" :

A talk of college and of ladies' rights,
A feudal knight in silken masquerade,
And, yonder, shrieks and strange experiments
For which the good Sir Ralph had burnt them all—
This were a medley !

"With such art does the poet prepare us for the wild incongruities of his Romance, in which the outward forms and customs of medieval Europe constitute the setting of an essentially modern English Institution" (**Wallace**).

(3) Ida's Scheme : Its Impracticable Nature

"And all this profusion of grotesque discrepancy is designed for the accentuation of the essentially ridiculous and impracticable character of the scheme to which the Princess had devoted her life." Full justice is done to her noble energy and enthusiasm, and in the earnest tone which dominates the more serious portions of the poem we can see with what reverent appreciation Tennyson regards his heroine's efforts to procure for her sex a more generous treatment than has been ordinarily accorded to them, as far as facilities for education and culture are concerned. "The wrongs of women are dwelt upon with fervent indignation, and the vital importance to society involved in giving them full scope for the development of every side of their higher capacities is fully and frankly recognised ; but the means adopted by Ida for the attainment of this end, her contemptuous withdrawal from the society of men, her defiance of the fundamental human instincts, her cultivation of the intellect alone, to the neglect of the affections and the moral life, are ridiculed and satirised" (**Wallace**).

Artistic Merits of the Poem

To-day we read the poem not for its theme, nor for the lessons it teaches, but for its grace, melody, imagery, richness of colour, in short for its many artistic excellencies. *The Princess* may be a medley, but the medley includes such a abundance of artistic beauties, that we run some risk of becoming surfeited with sweets. There are many passages in *The Princess* that surpass,

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line for line, almost any other poetic work of the same kind of any other writer in the language ; and the whole poem is so replete with what is wise and good and graceful, that in this respect it may be compared with *In Memoriam*, but, as far as we are aware, with no other poem in English literature. "*The Rape of the Lock* has been compared to *The Princess*, a very unfortunate comparison for Pope ; by the side of *The Princess*, the graceful form of Pope's famous poem can no longer conceal coarseness of wit, meanness of satire, banality of fancy, insincerity of artifice ; it is the perfection of pettiness. But in Tennyson even the fireworks of fancy flash against a moonlit heaven of imagination, and there is nothing in *The Rape of the Lock*, and surely again, there is nothing in all literature, that can approach such a delicate interweaving of the graceful and the grotesque as will be found in this poem" (**Wallace**).

Next, as regards word-painting, the description of the tournament may be a little overwrought, but to match it we go naturally to *The Idylls of the King*. Of gesture painting, the examples are admirable and abundant :

Thereat the Lady stretch'd a vulture throat,
And shot from crooked lips a haggard smile.

is one among a dozen such. The small sweet song, "*Come down, O maid, from yonder mountain height,*" is of extraordinary excellence. In fact, all the songs are matchless. Indeed, to describe even a tenth of the minor beauties of *The Princess* is far from possible. "Certainly, as hinted above, the poet's thoughts sometimes appear over-dressed ; and remind us of certain photographs in which the finery and not the person makes the picture. But on this very account of excess of ornament the poem offers the best material extant for the student of literary art."

The Nature-background

Nature, in this poem, is either ornamental, or used to intensify human emotion ; but how excellent is the poet's work in either case :

Not a thought, a touch,
But pure as lines of green that streak the white
Of the first snowdrop's inner leaves.

This remarkable climax, following close on another, reminds us of,

Chaste as the icicle
That's curdled by the frost from purest snow,
And hangs on Dian's temple.

Wallace comments on the passage "Chaste as a cold, bright point of ice; not any ice, but ice curdled; not by any other agency, but by frost; not from water, but from the melted snow; not any snow, but

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the purest ; the purest of the pure, for it lay on the roof of the temple of the goddess of chastity herself." The following passage puts us in mind of the manner in which Victor Hugo makes nature interpose to sympathise with human emotions :

"Till notice of a change in the dark world
Was lispt about the acacias, and a bird
That early woke to feed her little ones
Sent from a dewy breast a cry for light.

Opinion of Critics

Legouis and Cazamian's praise of the poem is fully justified : "*The Princess* introduces a serious idea in a way at once attractive and pleasing, though not a little over sweet ; the grave nature of the theme is often a disturbing element in the easy enjoyment of what is essentially a fantasy ; and, on the other hand, the charm of the scenic descriptions tends to eclipse the rather fictitious dramatic action, borne up by characters who are too obviously the puppets of theory. And yet, the descriptive or emotional lyricism in the poem develops round the structure of a subject ; the scenes or episodes, a trifle deficient in sustained energy, which the poet spontaneously produces, nevertheless group themselves into a whole where each supports the other. Several of the interludes are of rare and entrancing beauty." According to **Saintsbury**, "*the poem is the consummate expression of Tennyson's mastery in blank verse, and is one of the most charming, if not one of the greatest, poems in the English language.*"

The Characters : (1) The Prince's Father

A word may now be said regarding the various characters in the poem. The Prince's father, the, "hard old king," represents in his blunt, violent manner the old-fashioned regime, when women were women and knew their place, and before these fantastic notions of "equal rights" had begun to, "shake the pillars of domestic peace". To him women are beings essentially of another mould, not so distinctly inferior to men as altogether outside the sphere of comparsion with them. He is not devoid of a certain rough respect for the sex, and speaks with affectionate pride of his dead wife. But to him it is absurd that they should be allowed to play such pranks as the founding of a Female Academy, taking it upon themselves to organise their lives after their own views of right and justice, and setting at defiance the arrangements of their betters—this must be checked at once, otherwise the order of the universe will be disturbed.

(2) The Monarch of the South

A ridiculous contrast to him is afforded by his brother-monarch of the south, with his timid, defiant manner, and his painful anxiety

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to be pleasant. He is utterly incapable of enforcing his will in any respect, and is lightly neglected by all his vigorous family, though he likes to chatter about his amorous youth, and insists in his feeble way upon the respect due to his rank.

(3) The Prince

To the character of *the Prince* himself it has been objected that it is not sufficiently heroic, or even strongly marked, considering the important part he plays in the story. That this is no real blot upon the poem is well shown by **Mr. Dawson** : "*To bring out the Prince more strongly, would have detracted from the unity of the poem. The Princess is not overcome by him or by his merits. She is worsted by Nature—by the constituted order of things.*" Indeed, the poet seems to have taken pains to insist upon the comparative weakness of this character. He must not be mean, of course, or in any way despicable, but it must be clearly shown that it was not the glamour of his physical or moral brilliance that won his lady from her isolation. His too emotional temperament and susceptibility to fits, added for the first time in the fourth Edition of the Poem, was probably intended to emphasise this point. At the same time it is plain that there was a further moral purpose in the introduction of this feature. For not only is the woman incomplete in herself, but, correspondingly, the man also cannot attain his full perfection until he has found his complement. Princess Ida's womanhood is not developed till she has recognised the fallacy of her scheme of seclusion, and the Prince appeals to her to, "accomplish his manhood", no less than "herself" by yielding her heart to his (**Wallace**).

(4) Cyril

The character of Cyril is an admirable study of vigorous, healthy common-sense, undisturbed by haunting fancies, unfettered by false modesty, and clear-sighted, and jovial. His sound knowledge of human nature is humorously demonstrated in his manner of dealing with the two Tutors—Psyche he appeases by a delicate compliment to her ability as a lecturer and an expression of admiration for her baby—Balanche he persuades to silence by an appeal to her ambition. "*The illustration of his moral temperament, superficially frivolous but sound at bottom, by reference to the water-lily, is one of the happiest similes in literature*" (**Wallace**).

(5) Princess Ida

"Lady Ida is essentially earnest and devoted to her cause for its own sake ; nor can we doubt but that she would have gloriously justified at need her assertion that she would shrink from no personal sacrifice which might promote the welfare of her darling purpose." Nor is her generous enthusiasm, which dazzles her lover, swells her brother's heart with pride, and commands even the respect

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of the Northern King, in any way the less admirable on account of the monstrous or ridiculous positions into which she is occasionally forced by the burning indignation that dominates her."

(6) Lady Blanche

In striking contrast to the unselfishness which pervades every moment of her life is presented the narrow, jealous disposition of *Lady Blanche*. "It has been well remarked that these two ladies stand respectively towards the College as do Brutus and Cassius in Shakespeare's Play towards the cause of the Republic." One had devoted her whole energies unreservedly towards the attainment of an end from which others should benefit—the other regarded the Institution as a means for ignoble self aggrandisement, and is willing to desert it when she conceives that her end may be more effectively secured elsewhere. Envious, self-centred, treacherous, she lacks even the redeeming feature of love for her child or respect for the memory of her dead husband. It is noteworthy, as **Mr. Dawson** remarks, that she is, "*the one thoroughly repulsive woman in all Tennyson's works.*"

(7) Psyche

Psyche has not the profound earnestness and majestic mien of her mistress, the Princess, and is in consequence more immediately charming. She is, in fact, essentially feminine, both in heart and in manner. "Her position at the College she invests with a certain prettiness that withdraws our attention from the lecture to the lecturer, but we feel that it is only an incidental episode in her life, and her discovery of her brother lets loose the natural flow of those tender affections which later, at the loss of her child, are developed with almost tragic intensity."

(8) Baby Agatha, the Real Heroine

The real heroine of the poem is baby Agatha. The baby has far reaching effects both on character and action. It is the central point on which the plot turns ; it makes its appearance again and again at critical moments in the story, and exercises a softening and moderating influence.

The Songs

The greatest beauty and appeal of *The Princess* lies in its songs, which have found their place in most anthologies of English lyrics. *The Princess* is little read to-day, its theme has grown out-dated, but its songs still retain their freshness and charm. They show Tennyson's lyric gifts at their best ; they will be read and enjoyed as long as the English language and literature last.

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15

Idylls of the King : Introduction and Appreciation

Composition of the Poem : Its Nature

The Idylls of the King contain a series of twelve connected poems, of which the first fragment, *Morte D' Arthur*, subsequently incorporated in, '*The Passing of Arthur*', was published in 1842. The other eleven stories were added during the course of fears, and in this way was formed a kind of epic woven round king Arthur. These poems form parts in a general presentment of the story of Arthur, of his noble design of the Round Table, and of its failure under the ever widening influence of evil, in the shape of the sin of one of the knights, Arthur's Lancelot, and Queen Guinevere. It is a story of bright hope followed by growing disillusionment, of which the chief protagonists are the melancholy characters of Arthur and Guinevere, Lancelot and Elaine.

The Arthurian Legend

Two great kings, Arthur of England and Charlemagne of France, were made in the middle ages the centres of two great cycles of Romance. Each cycle presented its king as the visible head of Christendom, with a group of faithful knights. The chief of these knights was distinguished above others, and was the type of manly valour.

The mythical tales that have gathered round Charlemagne deal with a personage whose conquests are matters of authentic history ; but regarding Arthur little of real fact has been ascertained ; all that modern reseach can tell us with any certainty is that there was in the sixth century a war-leader in Britain called Artus, or Arthur who, after the departure of the Romans, headed the tribes of Cumbria and by his valour and martial skill drove away the encroaching Saxons from the east and the Picts and Scots from the north ; and that five or six centuries later, "the name of King Arthur had come to stand for an ideal of royal wisdom, chivalric virtue,

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and knightly prowess which was recognised alike in England, France and Germany."

Some Earlier Versions of the Legend

The Arthurian legend has afforded materials for many poets, both English and foreign ; its development in English literature can be clearly traced. The earliest legends of Arthur are to be found in the Welsh Tales, in the Breton and German Romances, and in Chronicles such as that of St. Gildas de Ruys, *De Excidio Britanniae.* Between 1130 and 1147 Geoffrey of Monmouth, gave a long account of Arthur's exploits in his *Historia Britonum,* a fabulous Latin chronicle of Britain. The Popularity of this History gave a new currency to the stories. Geoffrey's work was turned into French verse by Gaimar and also, with many additional details about Arthur, by Wace, a Jersey poet. The legends up to this point recounted deeds of mere animal courage and passion.

Malory's Mort D' Arthur : Its Significance

In 1470 Sir Thomas Malory used the materials he found in "many noble volumes," for the making of his *"Book of King Arthur and of his noble knights of the Round Table."* The book is called by *Caxton,* who printed it in 1485, *"thys noble and Joyous book entytled le Morte D' Arthur"* ; and in his preface to it the printer says that it contains *"many joyous and pleasant histories and noble and renowned acts of humanity, gentleness and chivalry."* Malory's book is for the modern reader the most accessible and best known storehouse of Arthurian legend. Upon this Tennyson has founded some of his Idylls of the King.

Tennyson and the Arthurian Legend

On Tennyson the Arthurian Romance began, very early in his life, to exercise a strong fascination. We are told that, when quite a boy, he chanced upon a copy of Malory's book, and often with his brothers held mimic tournaments after the fashion of knights of the Round Table. A early as 1832, he published *The Lady of Shalott,* the incidents of which afterwards formed the framework of *The Idyll of Elaine.* Ten yours later his *Morte D' Arthur* appeared ; an introduction to this poem represented it as a fragment of a long epic, all the rest of which, as being, "faint Homeric echoes, nothing worth," the author had thrown into the fire. Five years previously to this publication, Walter Savage Landor, who had heard the *Morte 'D Arthur* read aloud from manuscript, wrote : *"It is more Homeric than any poem of our time, and rivals some of the noblest poetry in the Odyssea."* Two shorter Arthurian poems, *Sir Galahad,* and *Lancelot and Guinevere,* were contained in the same volume with *Morte 'D Arthur.* The first issue of *Idylls of King.* comparising only four Idylls—*Enid, Vivien, Elaine,* and *Guinevere*—appeared in 1859. The remaining *Idylls* were published at intervals between 1869 and

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1872, with the exception of *Balin and Balen*, 'an introduction to Merlin and Vivien,' contained with other poems in a volume given to the world in 1885. The original fragment, *Morte'd Arthur*, now forms part of the last Idyll, *The Passing of Arthur*.

The Idyll : Defined and Explained

'Idyll', 'a little picture', was the title originally used in Greek Literature for short picturesque poems, such as *the Idylls* of Theocritus, the Sicilian (B.C. 280) ; these generally depict common incidents in the life of simple folk in country or in town—the loves and jealousies of shepherds, the toils of fishermen, or sight-seeings in a great city. Later imitators, Theocritus and Virgil, for example, took rural life almost exclusively as the scenery of their Idylls ; hence *'Idyllic' is now generally understood as implying an idealised rusticity, the simplicity of the country without its coarseness.* So Tennyson calls the shepherd love-song, quoted by Ida in *The Princess*, "a small sweet Idyll" and has given the title of *English Idylls* to poems like his *Dora*, *The Gardener's Daughter*, and *Sea-Dreams*. But the term *'Idyll'* may rightly be used of any *'picture poem'*, that is, a poem which gives a highly-wrought and complete representation of any scene of life and has for motive one leading sentiment. *The Idylls of the King* are not pastoral poems ; they are of a loftier and noble strain and are informed with a more serious purpose. Each Idyll is complete in itself as presenting a separate picture, but each at the same time fills its place in a connected series grouped round a central figure. The twelve books of *the Idylls of the King* form one great Poem, characterised by Epic unity of design and grandeur of tone ; they present a full cycle of heroic story and have a rightful claim to be known as the "Epic of Arthur."

"The Idylls of the King" : Its Moral Significance

The spiritual significance which is seen to be so "deeply interfused" through this great poem, now that it can be studied as a completed work of art, was not so evident in the detached instalments first published. They were regarded as "rich pictorial fancies taken, certainly not at randum, but without any really coherent design, out of a great magazine of romantic story", and were read with delight for their, "exquisite magnificance of style," as **Swinburne** calls it, the elaborate melody of rhythm, the richness and truth of illustration, and the grandeur of tone that marked them. And, indeed, apart from any secondary significance which they are meant to contain, the lover of poetry and romance will always feel the intrinsic charm both in the form and in the substance of these tales of, "wonder and woe, of amorous devotion and fierce conflict and celestial vision". It is for the story and the style that each Idyll should first be read ; their 'moral' is best reserved for separate, subsequent consideration. The spiritual significance is never obtruded by the poet, and it is only in his *Epilogue* to *The Queen*

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that he tells us of the grand moral purpose which is now recognised as clearly and consistently running through the *Idylls*. The King Arthur of *the Idylls* is something more than a model of kingly virtue and knightly prowess, and the story of the founding and the dissolution of the Round Table is not solely a narrative of romantic adventure, and of the love, the passions, and the sins of knights and ladies. The *Idylls* reflect the eternal struggle in the life of mankind of good against evil, of the spiritual against the sensual element of our nature. A personal friend of the poet has written as follows regarding the scope of the Idylls : "If *In Memoriam* is the record of a human soul, *the Idylls* mean the history, not of one man or of one generation, but of a whole cycle, of the faith of a nation failing and falling away into darkness. It is the dream of man coming into practical life, and ruined by one sin. Birth is a mystery, and death is a mystery, and in the midst lies the table-land of life, and its struggle and performance." *The Idylls* themselves are not devoid of definite, outspoken testimony to their own inner meaning. In *Guinevere*, Arthur himself re-counts how on founding the Order of the Round Table he made his knights, swear,

> *To reverence the king, as if he were*
> *Their conscience, and their conscience as their king.*

and later in the same Idyll the repentant Queen, recognizing at last the height of Arthur's purity, cries,

> *Ah, great and gentle lord*
> *Who wast, as is the conscience of a saint,*
> *Among his warring senses, to thy knights.*

The Characters

Yet the poem is not a mere allegory. Arthur and his knights and the ladies of his court are not abstractions of ideal qualities ; they are real men and women, with human feelings and trials and conflicts ; they do represent and embody certain virtues and vices, but these qualities work and live in their work and their lives. Some purely allegorical figures are, indeed, introduced, as that of the Lady of the Lake personifying Religion ; and in the visions of Percieal in *The Holy Grail* there is more of symbolism than reality. But these figures and visions are clearly distinct from the human personae of the stories.

Arthur : His Symbolic Significance

King Arthur, the central figure, is a man in whom the higher instincts of his nature dominate the lower, and whose whole life is governed by the law within. He is, as Guinevere too late acknowledges, "the highest and most human too." The kingdom which "for a space" he establishes, and which in spite of downfall he will come to establish again, is the rule of conscience ; and in his coming, his foundation of the Round Table "for love of God and men," his

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continued endeavour to keep his knights true to their vows, his failure, and his mysterious passing which is not death, we see a reflection of the conflict eternally waged in human life between the spirit and the flesh, "with the lusts thereof." Arthur's visible enemies are the heathens, whom he overcomes ; but more subtle foes than the heathens are the evil passions and the mystic delusions of his own Christian court and household, which in the end prevail over and ruin his, "boundless purpose."

The Idylls : Its Setting

Tennyson disavows any historical intention, such as is characteristic of the true Epic. Indeed, the legends themselves, as read in Malory's book, make no pretence to historical truth, "Even Malory's setting of the stories belongs to times near his own rather than to the times which he tells of, to the age of chivalry and the Crusades rather than to the rude simplicity of the real Arthur's era, to the twelfth rather than to the sixth century". Tennyson has gone still further, and while retaining from Malory the scenic accessories of the spear, the tournament and the heraldic device, as well as the chivalric virtues of courtesy and reverence for womanhood, has placed the court of Arthur in a mental and moral atmosphere not far remote from that in which the poet's own contemporaries moved. As the pomp and circumstance and the refinement of chivalry in Malory's work are foreign to the times of the ancient British war-leader, so the self-questioning of Tristram and the philosophies of Dagonet, for example, in *The Last Tournament*, are a development quite beyond the purview of Malory's times. Tennyson has taken the dim personages of the early annals, surrounded as he found them in Malory by the romantic glamour and mysticism of a later age, and has idealised them still further to suit his own poetic purpose and the advanced thought of the nineteenth century—**(Rowe and Webbe)**.

The Various Idylls (1) "The Coming of Arthur"

The first in the series of the Idylls is *The Coming of Arthur*. In this poem, the King is crowned and married to Guinevere ; the land is subdued to peace and justice ; the pagans and the Romans are driven out, and the Round Table established.

(2) "Gareth and Lynette"

Next comes *Gareth and Lynette*. It represents "the spring time of Arthur's glory, when the Round Table seemed to be indeed a model for the mighty world and the King himself the representative of Christ upon Earth." Gareth is the image of the Arthurian kingdom in its youthful energy, purity and gentleness ; he is moreover the incarnation of the vigour, courage, gaiety and audacity of youth. The taint of moral poison in the shape of the sin of Lancelot and Guinevere has not yet crept in ; this is the period,

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"When every morning brought a noble chance
And every chance brought out a noble knight.

(3) "Geraint' and (4) "Enid"

The Marriage of *Geraint* and *Enid*, which were originally printed as one Idyll, show us the beginning of corruption ; suspicions of his wife's chastily are bred in Geraint's mind by rumours of the queen's unfaithfulness. These suspicions of Geraint "prepare us for the world's loud whisper breaking into storm ;" and Enid, the pure and loyal wife, serves as a contrast to Queen Guinevere.

(5) "Balin and Balan"

In *Balin and Balan*, the rumours about the queen's unfaithfulness gain currency, and are responsible for the tragedy of the two brothers.

(6) 'Merlin and Vivien'

In *Merlin and Vivien*, the evil comes into clear light and spreads widely in the court. Vivien, the wily and malignant daughter of a man, killed fighting against Arthur, comes to Arthor's Court to sow suspicion, and then by her physical charms, she brings the old and wise Merlin under her power. *"The victory of sense over soul becomes more and more assured."*

(7) 'Lancelot and Elaine'

In *Lancelot and Elaine*, we see the beginning of the retribution for the sin of Lancelot and Guinevere. The death of Elaine, "the lily maid of Astolat" is due to Lancelot's guilty passion for the queen.

(8) 'Holy Grail'

In the *Holy Grail*, a new cause of the failure of Arthur's work and the Round Table is introduced. There are two things which, according to Tennyson, break up the Round Table and destroy the work of Arthur ; the first is the lust of the flesh and the second is the mystic-ascetic religion or superstition in the field of religion. ***Merlin and Vivien*** represents the first and the *Holy Grail* represents the second. The knights, misled by mystic dreams, desert their duties and follow 'wandering fires." Thus their true faith is lost in superstitions.

(9) Pelleas and Ettarre

In *Pelleas and Ettarre*, we see the hope and faith of the young Pelleas shattered by the bitter experience of the prevailing corruption in the court.

(10) The Last Tournament

In *The Last Tournament*, we see the complete triumph of the senses over the soul. After the tournament, in which the false-hearted Tristram has won the prize, Arthur returns to find his home empty and Guinevere fled.

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(11) Guinevere

In *Guinevere*, we see the full effects of the sin of the queen. The Round Table is shattered and Arthur's work totally destroyed.

(12) "The Passing of Arthur"

The Passing of Arthur represents the last battle and the end of Arthur's earthly life. It gives a vivid account of the last dim battle in the West, and the departure of the king from this world. *The story is told through imagery very sombre and solemn in tone, befitting the ruin of great hopes.* Modred, the traitor (the nephew of Arthur), has made known the love of Guinevere and Lancelot; and Guinevere in sorrow has fled to the ruins at Almesbury. Arthur goes northward to attack Lancelot, and in his absence Modred raises the standard of rebellion and proclaims himself king. Returning from the north to punish Modred, Arthur has his last meeting with the repentant queen. The world seems dark and confused to the king ; his trusted friend and wife have been untrue ; the Round Table is dissolved by the sin that has crept in among the knights. The account of the great battle has been given with a largeness and mystery which intensify the sense of desolation. At the close of day, all the knights are killed and King Arthur is left alone with bold Sir Bedivere. The king is wounded mortally in the last combat with Modred, whom he kilies with one blow of his sword Excalibur. He commands Bedivere to throw his sword Excalibur into the lake, and report to him what happens. After being twice faithless, through temptation of the riches of the hilt, Bedivere flings Excalibur into the lake and reports to Arthur ;

Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him
But when I looked again, behold an arm
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
That caught him by the hilt and brandished him
Three times, and drew him under the mere.

"The sword, the soul's spiritual weapon, by which it had smitten its enemies in the battle of life, is returned to Religion, the Lady of the Lake ; for there is no longer need of it on the journey to the *Isles of Rest* where there is no warfare, but peace and ease".

Arthur is then carried by Bedivere to the shore of the lake, where lies a black barge, crowded with stately, black-hooded women. Three queens come forward to take Arthur on board the ship. Bedivere, at the king's command, places him on the barge, from which Arthur addresses him before departing,

The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

"The time has come when the pearl is to be sundered from the shell, when the soul passes from old order, life in the flesh, to the new

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order, beyond space and time". Slowly moves the sable barge from the shore, and with its wailing figures, vanishes beyond the horizon, and Bedivere stands gazing after it :

"Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand."
He has passed ; the spiritual fight is over.
And the new sun rose, bringing the new year."

Bedivere, forlorn and heart-broken after the passing away of Arthur, may be Tennyson himself after the death of Hallam.

"Arthur's earthly realm may 'reel back into the beast,' and his Round Table may be dissolved ; but his purity is untarnished, his honour is without stain, and the ideal which he has striven to realize has lost none of its inward vitality and significance" (**Rowe and Webbe**). As he passes from earth to, "vanish into the light," he already gives a forecast of his return as the representative of the new chivalry, when he shall come,

With all good things, and war shall be more.

Criticism of the Poem

Idylls of the King is a great work of art, and accounts for much of the contemporary popularity of Tennyson. But in recent times it has come in for a good deal of criticism. Say **Wyatt and Clay**, "In spite of the polished perfection of the verse, *the Idylls of the King* is not one of Tennyson's great works. He has not any real sympathy with medieval ideas ; and, if the poem is regarded simply as a modern one—as the suggestion of allegory in it seems to require—then the characterisation in it is not subtle enough, the persons are too faultily faultless, and the stories are too slight to create much interest." **Douglas Bush** is also critical of *the Idylls* and he writes, "*Idylls of the King*, which bulked so large in Tennyson's later work, and which especially made him a popular poet, are not much read in our time. The handling of the romantic material and the spiritual allegory—'sense at war with the soul'—and the stylized elegance are alike unreal to us. King Arthur seems to wear the white flower of a blameless life in the lapel of a Prince Albert. Yet, in the midst of artifice, Tennyson can still paint Nature, and his pictures of a society in decay have their moments. *The Holy Grail* is impressive as a whole, as a Victorian *Waste Land*, in its presentation of decadence and neurosis, the quest of spurious spirituality and excitement."

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16

The Lotos-Eaters

(*a*) THE POEM

"Courage!" he said, and pointed toward the land,
"This mounting wave will roll us shoreward soon."
In the afternoon they came unto a land
In which it seemed always afternoon.
All round the coast the languid air did swoon,
Breathing like one that hath a weary dream.
Full-faced above the valley stood the moon;
And, like a downward smoke, the slender stream
Along the cliff to fall and pause and fall did seem.

A land of streams! some, like a downward smoke,
Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn, did go;
And some thro' wavering lights and shadows broke,
Rolling a slumbrous sheet of foam below.
They saw the gleaming river seaward flow
From the inner land; far off, three mountain-tops,
Three silent pinnacles of aged snow,
Stood sunset-flush'd; and, dew'd with showery drops,
Up-clomb the shadowy pine above the woven copse.

The charmed sunset linger'd low adown
In the red West; thro' mountain clefts the dale
Was seen far inland, and the yellow down
Border'd with palm, and many a winding vale
And meadow, set with slender galingale ;
A land where all things always seem'd the same !
And round about the keel with faces pale,
Dark faces pale against that rosy flame,
The mild-eyed, melancholy Lotos-eaters came.

Branches they bore of that enchanted stem,
Laden with flower and fruit, whereof they gave

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To each, but whoso did receive of them
And taste, to him the gushing of the wave
Far far away did seem to mourn and rave
On alien shores; and if his fellow spake,
His voice was thin, as voices from the grave;
And deep-asleep he seem'd yet all awake.
And music in his ears his beating heart did make.

They sat them down upon the yellow sand,
Between the sun and moon upon the shore;
And sweet it was to dream of Fatherland,
Of child, and wife, and slave; but evermore
Most weary seem'd the sea, weary the oar,
Weary the wandering fields of barren foam.
Then some one said, "We will return no more."
And all at once they sang, "Our island home
Is far beyond the wave; we will no longer roam."

CHORIC SONG

I

THERE is sweet music here that softer falls
Than petals from blown roses on the grass,
Or night-dews on still waters between walls
Of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass;
Music that gentlier on the spirit lies,
Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes;
Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies.
Here are cool mosses deep,
And thro' the moss the ivies creep,
And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep,
And from the craggy ledge the poppy hangs in sleep.

II

Why are we weigh'd upon with heaviness,
And utterly consumed with sharp distress,
While all things else have rest from weariness?
All things have rest: why should we toil alone,
We only toil, who are the first of things,
And make perpetual moan,
Still from one sorrow to another thrown;
Nor ever fold our wings,
And cease from wanderings,
Nor steep our brows in slumber's holy balm;
Nor harken what the inner spirit sings,
"There is no joy but calm!"—
Why should we only toil, the roof and crown of things?

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III

Lo! in the middle of the wood,
The folded leaf is woo'd from out the bud
With winds upon the branch, and there
Grows green and broad, and takes no care,
Sun-steep'd at noon, and in the moon
Nightly dew-fed ; and turning yellow
Falls, and floats adown the air.
Lo! sweeten'd with the summer light,
The full-juiced apple, waxing over-mellow,
Drops in a silent autumn night.
All its allotted length of days
The flower ripens in its place,
Ripens and fades, and falls, and hath no toil,
Fast-rooted in the fruitful soil.

IV

Hateful is the dark-blue sky,
Vaulted o'er the dark-blue sea.
Death is the end of life; ah, why
Should life all labor be?
Let us alone. Time driveth onward fast,
And in a little while our lips are dumb.
Let us alone. What is it that will last?
All things are taken from us, and become
Portions and parcels of the deadful past.
Let us alone. What pleasure can we have
To war with evil? Is there any peace
In ever climbing up the climbing wave ?
All things have rest, and ripen toward the grave
In silence—ripen, fall, and cease:
Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreamful ease.

V

How sweet it were, hearing the downward stream,
With half-shut eyes ever to seem
Falling asleep in half-dream!
To dream and dream, like yonder amber light,
Which will not leave the myrrh-bush on the height
To hear each other's whisper'd speech;
Eating the Lotos day by day,
To watch the crisping ripples on the beach,
And tender curving lines of creamy spray;
To lend our hearts and spirits wholly
To the influence of mild-minded melancholy ;
To muse and brood and live again in memory,
With those old faces of our infancy

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Heap'd over with a mound of grass,
Two handfuls of white dust, shut in an urn of brass.

VI

Dear is the memory of our wedded lives,
And dear the last embraces of our wives
And their warm tears; but all hath suffer'd change;
For surely now our household hearths are cold,
Our sons inherit us, our looks are strange,
And we should come like ghosts to trouble joy.
Or else the island princes over-bold
Have eat our substance, and the minstrel sings
Before them of the ten years' war in Troy,
And our great deeds, as half-forgotten things.
Is there confusion in the little isle?
Let what is broken so remain.
The Gods are hard to reconcile;
'Tis hard to settle order once again.
There *is* confusion worse than death,
Trouble on trouble, pain on pain,
Long labor unto aged breath,
Sore tasks to hearts worn out by many wars
And eyes grown dim with gazing on the pilot-stars.

VII

But, propt on beds of amaranth and moly,
How sweet—while warm airs lull us, blowing lowly—
With half-dropt eyelid still,
Beneath a heaven dark and holy,
To watch the long bright river drawing slowly
His waters from the purple hill—
To hear the dewy echoes calling
From cave to cave thro' the thick-twined vine—
To watch the emerald-color'd water falling
Thro' many a woven acanthus-wreath divine!
Only to hear and see the far-off sparkling brine,
Only to hear were sweet, stretch'd out beneath the pine.

VIII

The Lotos blooms below the barren peak,
The Lotos blows by every winding creek;
All day the wind breathes low with mellower tone;
Thro' every hollow cave and alley lone
Round and round the spicy dawns the yellow Lotos dust is blown.
We have had enough of action, and of motion we,

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Roll'd to starboard, roll'd to larboard, when the surge was seething free,

Where the wallowing monster spouted his foam-fountains in the sea.
Let us swear an oath, and keep it with an equal mind,
In the hollow Lotos-land to live and lie reclined
On the hills like Gods together, careless of mankind.
For they lie beside their nectar, and the bolts are hurl'd

Far below them in the valleys, and the clouds are lightly curl'd
Round their golden houses, girdled with the gleaming world;
Where they smile in secret, looking over wasted lands.

Blight and famine, plague and earthquake, roaring deeps and fiery sands,
Clanging fights, and flaming towns, and sinking ships, and praying hands.
But they smile, they find a music centred in a doleful song
Steaming up, a lamentation and an ancient tale of wrong,
Like a tale of little meaning tho' the words are strong;
Chanted from an ill-used race of men that cleave the soil,
Sow the seed, and reap the harvest with enduring toil,
Storing yearly little dues of wheat, and wine and oil;

Till they perish and they suffer—some, 'tis whisper'd—down in hell
Suffer endless anguish, others in Elysian valleys dwell,
Resting weary limbs at last on beds of asphodel.
Surely, surely, slumber is more sweet than toil, the shore
Than labor in the deep mid-ocean, wind and wave and oar;
O, rest ye, brother mariners, we will not wander more.

(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION—CRITICAL SUMMARY

Composition and Source

The Lotos-Eaters was first published in the volume of 1832, and was considerably revised and improved for the subsequent editions, till it acquired its present, finished form The theme of the poem was suggested by Homer's *Odyssey*. After the siege of Troy, Ulysses, the ablest and wisest of the Greek chieftains, passed through a long series of adventures before reaching his home. In the ninth book of the *Odyssey* it is told how Ulysses and his followers landed in a place apparently on the African coast where the inhabitants gave them the fruit of the Lotos to eat, and those who tasted it forgot their homes, and only wished to remain where they were. "The description of the land of the Lotos-eaters is of course ideal, and is intended to harmonise with the mental condition of dreamy content and distaste

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for any exertion, produced by eating of the Lotos." The spirit of lethargy in this poem is in striking contrast with the spirit of travel and adventure of the companion poem *Ulysses*. Though the inspiration for the poem came mainly from Homer, so many other poets have been laid under contribution that the poem may well be called, "a poesy of other men's flowers". There is no doubt, that merely the string that binds these flowers is Tennyson's, but as **Morton Luce**, points out that string is made up, "of no common magic."

The Interior Landscape

The poem opens with five Spensarian stanzas giving an account of the scenery and atmosphere of the Lotos land. In that island it is always after-noon, a time when people feel drowsy and are inclined to sleep. The air is languid and seems to swoon, and the sunset lingers in the west, as if charmed. Tennyson's art reaches perfection in the description of the waterfall which, "*Along the cliff to fall and pause and fall did seem.*" The interior of the island consists of yellow downs bordered with palms and grown over with, "slender galingale." The lotos-eaters come to the sailors of Ulysses and give them lotos fruit and flowers, and whosoever eats them at once feels drowsy and sleepy. We get one of the most beautiful word-pictures in the poem as the sailors, as if exhausted, sit on the sand, "*Between the Sun and the Moon upon the Shore.*" The sea, the oar, and the wandering foam all seem to them '*weary,*' and they decide that, "we will no longer roam" but lie there dreaming, "Of child, and wife and slave." Thus the nature background is in close harmony with the mood of the sailors ; the poem is a fine example of interior landscape-painting.

A Life of Escape : Arguments in Its Favour

Then follows the choric song. The sailors sing together, and in their song give arguments after arguments in favour of a life of rest and inaction. In the island there is sweet music,

> *Music that gentlier on the spirit lies,*
> *Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes.*

There are cool mosses through which ivy creeps and poppy flowers hang down their heads, as if sleep. They would never leave such pleasant surroundings. Moreover, in nature, they find that all things have rest. The leaf, the flower, the fruit, all grow and die at one place. They never move or roam about. Then why should they, who are, "*the roof and crown of things*", never fold their wings and have rest ? Besides this, human life is short, and it is no good to face the stormy ocean or fight with evil. It is far more sweet to lie reclining there, listening to the gentle, sweet music of the island, wholly under the influence of, "*mild-minded melanocholy.*" During their long absence from home, things must have changed there. Their sons must have taken their place, and assumed their power and authority, and their return would only spoil their joy. They would receive

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merely a cold welcome. Even if there is some confusion and trouble in their homeland, they can do nothing, for they have grown old and weak. Therefore, *"Let what is broken so remain"*, and let them rest reclined on, *"Beds of amaranth and moly."*

Pagan View of the Gods

In the last stanza of the poem the sailors cite the example of the Gods, as a further argument in favour of a life of rest and quiet. The Gods in their heaven have to do no work. They lie reclined on the hills, 'careless of mankind', drink their nector and hurl thunderbolts on mankind below. Instead of sympathising with man, they smile at his suffering, enjoy the sweet music of his prayer which is meaningless to them. They will not toil any more, say the sailors ; rather like the gods they will enjoy the sweet music of the island, rest on beds of asphodel, and, "will not wander any more." *It is to be noted that the conception of the gods given here is pagan, and not Christian.* They are not merciful and loving as the Christian God is, but indifferent and cruel. They even take pleasure in the suffering of mankind. However, it should be remembered that this view of the gods is not Tennyson's. The story belongs to pre-Christian times, and it is the view of Ulysses' sailors that Tennyson has rightly presented here.

The Poem : Its Artistic Excellence

The Lotos-eaters represents Tennyson as an artist at his best. It abounds in vivid and accurate pen-pictures. Lines like,

And, like a downward smoke, the slender stream
Along the cliff to fall and pause and fall did seem

bear witness to Tennyson's minuteness of observation of natural phenomena. The poem also furnishes numerous examples of the poet's verbal music and his skill in the manipulation of vowel sounds. The music of the liquid consonants *'l'*, *'m'*, and, *'n'*, may be noted in the following lines :

To lend our hearts and spirits wholly
To the influence of mild-minded melancholy
To muse and brood and live again in memory.

Here is an example of his use of alliteration :

Three silent pinnacles of aged snow
Stood sunset-flush'd : and dew'd with showery drops

Here is his use of vowel sounds contributing to music,

Up clomb the shadowy pine above the woven copse :

and,

Dark faces pale against that rosy flame.

The repetition of words, too, has a share in producing music. In the following lines alliteration has been combined with a repetition of words :

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Most weary seemed the sea, weary the oar,
Weary the wandering fields of barren foam.

As regards the poet's versification, **Auden** is of the view that *no one, except Spenser, has ever used the Spensarian stanza with such success as Tennyson has done in this poem.*

Creation of Atmosphere

However, it is in the creation of the atmosphere of lethargy and drowsiness that the poet's art has reached its consummation. This has been achieved *first* of all through the description of the objects and forces of nature in the island. For example, it "is always afternoon", "the charmed sunset", lingers in the wast, the water-falls seem to pause as they flow down hill, the languid air seems to swoon, and all things always seem the same. *Secondly*, there is a description of the mood of the sailors. As soon as they eat the lotos fruit, they feel tired and exhausted, as if asleep :

And if his fellow spake,
His voice was thin, as voices from the grave,
And deep sleep he seemed, yet all awake,
And music in his ears his beating heart did make.

Throughout the Choric song the description of the mood of the sailors alternates with the description of the scenic-background, and in this way the lethargy that has overtaken the sailors is intensified. Nature is shown in full sympathy with human moods. *Thirdly*, there is skilful use of words whose very sound conveys the sense of lethargy. Thus in the following lines the word *'weary'* has been repeated thrice :

Most **weary** *seemed the sea,* **weary** *the oar,*
Weary *the wandering fields of barren foam*

Different Interpretations

The poem has been interpreted in different ways by different scholars. Quite obviously, it sounds the romantic note of escapism. Just as Keats in his famous *Ode to the Nightingale* would like to escape the pressure of reality by taking wine, so also the sailors want to escape the responsibilities of life as soon as they have taken the lotos fruit. But does Tennyson favour a life of escape from the duties of life ? *Apparently, he gives arguments after arguments in favour of a life of complete rest and inactivity, but in reality his attitude towards such a life is ironic.* Man is roof and crown of things, and so he must not live like the animals, or other objects of nature. He must justify his superiority by action and achievement. Thus the arguments advanced by the sailors cut both ways.

John Pettigrew compares the poem to **T. S. Eliot's** *The Waste Land* and writes, "Lotos land offers not abundant life but spiritual death ;it is on Garen of the Hesperides but a magnificently ironic

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variation upon a wasteland." As in Eliot's poem, hollow men live (or rather exist) in a trance-like state with, 'tried eyelids upon tired eyes', their voices, 'thin/Like, voices from the grave', isolated from other men and unable to communicate with them, cut off from communion with family, country and a meaningful and vitalizing Nature. "In both poems, the past has become a bucket of ashes, a heap of broken images ; fragmented and dimly remembered, it also is incapable of giving a sustenance which is not wanted any way : 'Let what is broken so remain'."

The Epicurean gods of the Lotosland are as remote as Eliot's dying and buried gods ; here too men believe that 'Death is the end of life'. In both poems, enervation and desiccation of spirit is refracted through symbolic landscape ; the waters of the 'hateful sea' of troubles and life are as resented as the spring rains of *The Waste Land* stirring memory and desire. The 'land of streams' has waters as turgid as Eliot's Thames : rivers flow seaward but seem to wind up in marshes nourishing galingales ; waterfalls, with their conventional associations with 'strength of spirit, full and free', are only 'slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn' and their sheets of foam only 'slumbrous'. And on the island it 'seemed always afternoon', sunsets linger, and all things, 'ripen toward the grave/In silence'. "*Lotosland has yellow down and sleeping poppies, thick-twined vine and weeping, long-leaved flowers, not Eliot's dull roots, city streets and endless plains, but it is, as surely as Eliot's, 'Waste Land', a spiritual desert.*"

(*c*) **Critical Notes, Comments, Explanations, etc.**

Stanza 1 : Substance

During their return voyage from the war of Troy, Ulysses and his sailors reached the island of the lotos-eaters. In this island it always seemed to be afternoon. The very atmosphere was languid, and one felt drowsy and inclined to lie down and rest.

He—Ulysses. *The mounting wave*—the wave rising high.

It seemed always afternoon—the very atmosphere was languid, and one always felt drowsy and inclined to lie down and rest.

Languid—lazy ; lethargic.

Breathing—very slow in its movement.

Weary dream—is exhausted and sleepy.

Like a downward smoke—smoke or mist moving downward instead of rising. When the atmosphere is heavy with moisture, the smoke instead of rising up, moves downwards.

The slender stream—the thin stream. Students should note Tennyson's constant use of alliteration.

Along the Cliff to fall... ..did seem—the stream seemed to flow downward, then stop for a moment as if to rest, and then flow again. The very sound of the words in this line, conveys the meaning of

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the poet. It is a fine instance of Tennyson's use of *Onomatopeia*, a figure of speech in which the sound of words expresses their sense.

Stanza 2 : Substance

The poet continues with his description of the scenery of the island of the lotos-eaters. It was a land of streams, and a number of streams covered with foam flowed down the hills. At a distance could be seen three mountain tops covered with snow.

A land of streams—there were a number of streams in that island.

Slow-dropping.....lawn—the streams are being compared to lawn, a thin cloth. As the streams moved down the hills slowly, they looked like a veil of thin, transparent cloth floating down. It is a vivid and beautiful word-picture.

Wavering lights and shadows—the shades of trees, where light and dark was created alternately by the sunlight passiug through the leaves. *Broke*—came out.

Rolling a...below—carrying down with them sheet of foam. *Slumbrous*—sleepy ; slow moving.

From the inner land—from the interior of the island, the river was flowing outward to the sea.

Pinnacles– mountain peaks.

Sunset-flushed—the snow looked red in the red light of the declining sun. *Aged snow*—the snow which had been on the peaks for ages.

Dewed with showery drops—water drops on the leaves of trees looked like dew.

Up clomb—were rising high.

Shadowy pine—dark pine trees or shady pine trees. *Woven copse*—thick, dense shrubs or underwood.

Stanza 3 : Substance

The sunset seemed to linger in the west. Through the opening in the mountains one could see far into the interior. There were yellow fields and valleys lined with palm trees. Soon the lotos-eaters with their pale, melancholy faces came to Ulysses and his sailors, and stood round them.

Charmed—as if some magic spell had been cast over it.

Adown—down in the sky, quite near the earth.

Clefts—opening.

Downs—fields, yellow with the yellow-flowered lotos.

Winding—not straight ; ziz-zag.

Set with—decorated with.

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Slender galingale—the sedge, an aromatic plant with thin stem.

Keel—ship.

Faces pale...faces pale—such repetittion of words and phrases is a technical device used frequently by Tennyson to create music. Its too frequent use has been criticised as a mannerism.

Rosy flame—the red light of the setting sun. *Mild-eyed*—gentle.

Stanza 4 : Substance

The lotos-eaters gave to the sailors of Ulysses the lotos fruit. As soon as they tasted the fruit, a strange change came upon them. The voices of their companions seemed to them hollow and strange, as, "voices from the grave", and they felt lethargic and sleepy.

That enchanted stem—the magic, lotos plant.

Far far away did seem—it seemed to them as if the roar of sea-waves was coming to them, not from the nearby ocean, but from some distant, far off place.

To mourn and rave—the sound of the waves seemed to them to be a groan of suffering.

And deep sleep he seemed—a strange kind of lethargy overtook him and he felt inclined to sleep.

And music in his...did make—the beating of his heart sounded in his ears like music.

Stanza 5 : Substance

A strange lethargy overtook the sailors. They sat down on the sand, as if they were exhausted. They no longer wanted to return to their island home.

Between the sun and the moon—The sun was setting in the west and the moon was rising in the east. Thus sitting on the sand they had the sun on one side and the moon on the other.

Fatherland—their island home.

Most weary seemed.....barren foam—it seemed to them tiresome to sail on the sea, and use their oars. The repetition of *'weary'* is expressive of their own weariness and their desire for rest. It seemed that they had lost all their energy and were no longer capable of any activity. *The wandering fields of barren foam*—the reference is to the wide expanse of foam moving over the surface of the sea. The foam is *barren* as contrasted with the *fertile* plains of the island.

We will no longer roam—they decided to rest in the island and sail no more.

CHORIC SONG

(The sailors now sing together. Their song is expressive of their yearning for rest. They give arguments after arguments in favour of a life of rest and quiet).

7

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Stanza 1 : Substance.

There is sweet music in the island. There is cool moss and there are also beautiful flowers. They would like to lie down there and sleep.

There is sweet music.....on the grass—there is music in the island more soft and gentle than even the sound made by the falling of a rose petal on the ground.

Still waters—standing water ; water which is not flowing.

Of shadowy granite—mountain walls of dark granite. *Granite*—a kind of dark rock having particles of mica and quartz. *Gleaming pass*—the mountain pass shines in the light reflected from mica and quartz.

Night-dews on.....gleaming pass—the music in the island is even more gentle and soft than the soft sound made by the falling of dew at night on some standing water in a mountain pass, gleaming in the light reflected from particles of mica and quartz in the mountain rock.

Music that gentlier.....lies—music that is more soothing for the tired spirit.

The blissful skies—the sky which reins the blessing of peace; peace-giving.

Deep—growing thick.

Flowers weep—water drops fall down from them like tears from the sky One commentator explains it as, "droop their long leaves."

Craggy ledge—a projected piece of rock; a rocky projection.

The poppy hangs in sleep—the poppy flower hangs down, as if asleep. Opium which induces sleep is obtained from the poppy flower. Hence the poppy itself is said to be sleepy.

Stanza 2 : Substance

All things in nature have rest. Why is it that man alone has to work and is ever-burdened with cares and worries ? Man should also rest for, "*there is no joy but calm.*"

Weighed up—burdened; oppressed.

Heaviness—sorrows, and anxieties; cares and worries of life.

Utterly consumed—the human soul is entirely corroded and eaten away.

Sharp distress—deep anxiety.

All things else—all other objects and creatures of nature.

All things have rest—the repetition is expressive of their yearning for rest.

We only toil—the repetition here expresses their disgust for work and activity.

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The first of things—man, 'the roof and crown' of all created things; the first in importance among God's creatures.

Make perpetual moan—suffer constantly. *Still*—always. *From one sorrow to another thrown*—always tossed from one trouble to another.

Nor ever fold our wings—like birds at rest. Their sails are their wings.

Nor steep our brows.....balm—never apply the soothing balm of sleep to our faces ; never rest and wear a carefree look.

The inner spirit sings—the inner-most desire of the human soul.

Why should we only toil, the roof and crown of things ?—Man is the noblest of God's creatures and, therefore, ask the sailors, why he alone of God's creatures works and has no rest ? Man is the supreme creation of God and, therefore, he has a greater right to rest than the other creatures. But the argument acts both ways. Since man is higher in the scheme of creation, he must not lead a useless, animal existence. He must strive and achieve. Is Tennyson defending the sailors' point of view or holding it to ridicule ? *The Lotos-eaters* is a complex work of art and as such capable of a variety of interpretations.

Stanza 3 : Substance

The leaf, the flower, and the fruit all grow at one place till they fall and die out. They do not toil. Why should man alone work ceaselessly ?

The folded leaf—leaf which is not yet fully opened.

Wooed from out the bud—is brought out from inside the bud, and made to bloom.

Adown—downward.

Sweetened—made sweet and juicy.

Waxing over-mellow—growing over-ripe.

Ripens—flowers ; blooms.

Fast rooted...soil—grow at one place in the fertile soil. Their life is a life of rest and quiet, and not of ceaseless toil like the life of man.

Stanza 4 : Substance

To the sailors who have eaten the lotos fruit all labour, all activity, all work, is hateful. Life is short and it would soon come to an end. During the short time allotted to them, they would like to lie down in peace, and rest.

Vaulted—arched over ; bent over.

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Hateful is the dark.....blue sea—The sky overcast with dark clouds is hateful to them for it signifies storm, danger, and hard labour on the high seas.

Let us alone—they ask Ulysses to let them rest.

Our lips are dumb—we shall be dead.

What is that will last—nothing lives for ever.

Ripen towards the grave—mature, decay and die.

Dark death—death which takes one to the darkness of the grave. *Dreamful ease*—peace and quiet to indulge in day-dreaming.

Stanza 5 : Substance

It would be sweet indeed to lie down and rest and dream of their childhood friends and relatives.

Hearing the downward stream—listening to the sweet murmur of the river flowing to the sea.

Amber light—the golden light of the setting sun.

Myrrh-bush—an ever green bush. *On the height*—on the hill.

Whispered speech—conversation carried on in a low tone.

Crisping ripples—small curling waves. *Creamy spray*—waves with soft white foam.

Mild-minded—gentle. *To the influence of mind-minded melancholy*—to indulge in sweet, melancholy thoughts (they would think of the past, recollect the faces of their childhood friends. The recollection would be sweet, but it would also fill them with regret)

The students should note the use of alliteration and liquid consonants, '*l*', '*m*', and '*n*' in this line.

To muse and brood—to recollect.

Old faces of our infancy—childhood friends.

Heaped over with a mound of grass—dead and buried, with grass growing over their graves.

Shut in an urn of brass—the Greeks preserved the ashes of their dead in urns of metal.

Stanza 6 : Substance

They have been away from their island for more than twenty years. During this long time, even their wives and children must have forgotten them. Their return would simply disturb their joy. It is just possible that the neighbouring princes and powerful chieftains have already possessed their island. It is also possible that there is disorder in the island. But they have now grown old and it would be too much trouble for them to restore order and assert their

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rights. So instead of sailing for home, they would like to lie down there and rest.

Their warm tears—tears which they shed at the time of their departure for Troy.

For surely now...cold—during their long absence, their wives must have died.

Our sons inherit us—their sons must have taken their place as heads of the family ; they must have taken possession of their property.

Our looks are strange—they must have forgotten even our faces. *To trouble joy*—to disturb their happy peaceful life.

The island princes—the powerful chieftains of the island.

Have eat our substance—have consumed and possessed what belonged to us.

Confusion—disorder. *Our island*—Ithaca over which Ulysses ruled.

The Gods are hard to reconcile—if the gods are angry it would be difficult to please them.

Aged breath—old people.

Sore task—work is painful.

Pilot stars—the pole star, and other stars which, in the past, guided the sailors on the high seas.

Stanza 7 : Substance

It would be sweet, indeed, to lie down there and rest, and dreamily watch the various scenes and sights of the island.

Propt—reclining ; lying at rest.

Amaranth—a beautiful, unfading flower. *Moly*—a white flower.

Lull us—send us to sleep, as if by singing a lullaby. *Lowly*—gently.

But, propt on.....lowly—the concentration of vowel sounds and liquid consonants makes these lines very musical.

Half-dropt eyelid—half shut eyes; drowsily. *Still*—always.

To watch the long bright river, etc.—the river is here personified, and supposed to be drawing water downhill and carrying it to the ocean. It is a beautiful, vivid, word-picture.

Dewy echoes—soft echo caused by the falling of water-drops in the caves.

Woven acanthus-wreath divine—graceful, inter-twined leaves of the acanthus plant. "The wreath is woven by the natural growth of the plant" (**Hadow**).

Sparkling brine—the shining sea.

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Stanza 8 : Substance

The sailors are tired of work, action, and movement. They are determined to live in the island, and lie reclined there in comfort and peace as do gods in their heaven, careless of mankind and its toil and trouble. *"Slumber is more sweet than toil"*, and so they will not wander any more.

The barren peaks—hill-tops on which nothing grows. *Creek*—inlet ; opening in the mountains.

The lotos blooms...the lotos blooms—the repetition suggests the abundance and luxuriant growth of lotos in the island.

Alleys lone—lonely paths through forest trees.

Spicy downs—low lying fields covered with fragrant flowers.

Rolled to.....larboard—tossed this way and that way in the storm. *Starbord*—right hand side. *Larboard*—left hand side.

When the surge was seething free—when there was a storm and the waves rose high.

The wallowing monster—the whales of huge size.

Spouted his.....in the sea—the whale throws up water from its nose, like a fountain.

With an equal mind—with the same firmness.

Careless of mankind—entirely indifferent to mankind, as gods are in heaven or on Mount Olympus (In this line, and the lines which follow, the conception of the Gods is Pagan, rather than Christian. The gods are represented as indifferent, even cruel, to mankind, rather than embodiment of the Christian virtues of Love and Mercy).

Their nectar—the divine drink; the drink of the gods. *They lie*—they lie reclined on Mount Olympus, the abode of the Gods, in Greek mythology.

Bolts—thunderbolts.

Far below them in the valleys—on mankind living in the valleys below Mount Olympus.

Girdled with the gleaming worlds—surrounded by the twinkling stars.

They smile in secret—the gods are not only indifferent, but actually malicious and hostile.

Blight—misfortune; destruction.

Deeps—oceans *i e.* storm which they themselves have caused.

Clanging fights—battles in which weapons of steel strike each other and produce a clanging sound. An instance of *onomatopeia.*

Flaming—burning. *Praying hands*—people praying to the gods with lifted hands.

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They find a music.....song—the moaning and crying of mankind gives them pleasure, like sweet music. *Doleful*—sorrowful.

Steaming up—rising up.

An ancient tale of wrong—the story of mankind, which is a long story of suffering.

Like a tale.....strong—the gods fail to understand the sorrow and suffering of mankind. It is of no significance to them.

Chanted—sung.

Cleave the soil—till the fields.

Little dues of—small quantities of.

Elysian valleys—the valleys of Paradise, the abode of the souls of the virtuous.

Asphodel—a flowering plant, like lily.

———

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This poem is closely modelled on Dante's 'Ulysses' as described in Canto 26th Canto of the 'Inferno'. Two phrases and verbal echoes we find pronounced influence of Classical poets Virgil and Homer. But despite indebtedness his treatment of Ulysses is original. Ulysses remains "the noblest of all classical poems of Tennyson.

17

Expression of victorian urge for action, for life, for excitement, for travel, adventure and discovery.

Ulysses (1842)

(a) THE POEM

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags, unproductive rocks
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
I cannot rest from travel; I will drink
Life to the lees. All times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea. I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known,—cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honor'd of them all,
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains; but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

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This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
This labor, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees
Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
Of common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods,
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail;
There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me,—
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads,—you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honor and his toil.
Death closes all; but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks;
The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achiles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are,—
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION —CRITICAL SUMMARY

The Poem : Its Publication ; Its Source

Ulysses was first published in 1842, like *Break, Break, Break* and *The Two Voices*, Soon, after Arthur Hallam's death, and it expresses the poet's feeling about the need of going forward and facing life, despite the bereavement he has suffered. Ulysses was the

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legendary Greek hero, the story of whose heroic deeds and adventures is sung by Homer in his *Odyssey*. However, Tennyson's Ulysses is closely modelled on Dante's Ulysses as sketched in the 26th Canto of *the Inferno*. The influence of classical poets, Homer and Virgil, is seen in phrasing and many verbal echoes. But despite this indebtedness, Tennyson's treatment is original, and *Ulysses* remains, "*the noblest of all Tennyson's classical poems*" (**Fowler**).

A Dramatic Monologue

Ulysses is a dramatic monologue. It is dramatic because it expresses the feeling not of the poet, but of Ulysses, and it is monologue because only one person speaks throughout. The others merely listen to him. Ulysses, the hero of the Trojan War, returned to his island state of Ithaca after twenty years. He has been ruling his state for some time, but the life of peace, devoid of adventure, does not suit him. In the poem, he is supposed to be standing at the coast of the sea, surrounded by his sailors, whom he exhorts to follow him in quest of more knowledge and experience.

Arguments in Favour of Travel and Adventure

He gives arguments after arguments in favour of a life of travel and adventure. First, the people of the island are uncivilised, the laws are unjust, and so he will not like to rule there. His wife has grown aged, and the people do not understand his real nature. Secondly, he has grown used to a life of adventure, and the inactive life of a king does not suit him. He has visited many lands and known many people with their different habits and ways of life, but there are still many more lands to be seen, and he is eager to visit them. The more he knows, the greater is his thirst for knowledge. He would like to, "follow knowledge like a sinking star." Human life is short and knowledge is infinite, and, therefore, no time is to be wasted. At home one becomes rusted ; one shines only in use. He has only a few more years to live, and he would devote them to the pursuit of as much knowledge and experience as possible.

As regards his island, he has no worry about its government. His son Telemachus is quite sensible and prudent, and he would look after the welfare of his state. He would give due worship to the gods, and would also take care of his old mother with love and tenderness. He is interested in the ordinary, everyday duties of life, while he himself craves for travel and adventure. So, he would be quite happy to stay in the island and rule over it, while he himself would enjoy his life of adventure abroad.

Therefore, they must set sail with him that very night. In the past they have cheerfully faced together great dangers and difficulties, and they would also do so in the future. In the past they achieved much that was noble. No doubt, they have grown old, but noble achievement is possible even in old age. They would sail towards

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the west even beyond the western horizon. It is just possible that they would be drowned, but is it also possible that they may reach the Happy Isles, the abode of their dead heroes. They may be physically weak, but they are still strong in determination. So they would set sail, *"to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."*

The Subjective Note prompted by Hallam's death, found release from pain in the creation of the beautiful –

Ulysses has a well-marked autobiographical element. It is expressive of Tennyson's feelings about the need of facing life, despite the bereavement he had recently suffered. As **John Pettigrew** points out, *"Ulysses*, also springs from powerful feelings prompted by Hallam's death, and it shows Tennyson finding release from pain in the creation of the beautiful, and his fondness for adapting legend to clothe personal emotion." *Ulysses* is deeply personal in such things as, "its expression of a sensibility divided between the claims of retreat and involvement, its note of courage, its elegiac melancholy, its restless dissatisfaction with the present and wish for fuller life, its yearning for the days that are no more and far, far away." Tennyson's remark that there was much of himself in the poem is true in a wider sense than he intended, for *Ulysses* is also quintessential of the, 'Tennysonian', gathering into itself all that is representative and best in his early work and displaying magnificently its infinite riches in a little room. "The work is Tennysonian, and its abundance, variety and complete competence show just how impossibly limiting that adjective is."

Different Interpretations (Victorian urge for action, for life, for excitement, travel, discovery)

Ulysses is a complex work of art and as such is capable of different interpretations. It has been interpreted as an expression of the Victorian urge for action, for life, for excitement, for travel, adventure and discovery. But it has also been interpreted as an escape poem. Says **John Pettigrew,** *"Ulysses* is great if read as a poem expressive of an indomitable will, summoning up every reserve of resolute courage and seeking new worlds to conquer. But, as Tennyson's situation at the time of its writing and the literary tradition that he evokes suggest, *Ulysses is far richer than that. Indeed, its essential greatness stems not from the power of noble feeling, but from the complexity of characterization with its conflict of feelings".*

That this is so is suggested strongly even by a cursory examination of Ulysses' speech. He talks of noble work and shows us that Ithaca cries out for it, but he is idle and leaves leadership to Telemachus. He says that he is following knowledge and seeking fuller life, but he forces us to ask if he is not rather seeking escape from duty in unceasing activity, even in suicide. He is ture to himself, but apparently false to his kingdom and his mariners. Is he, proud, or merely egocentric ? Promethean, or Satanic ? The responsible man of action, or the escapist ? Is it he, or Telemachus, who is most like Arthur, 'Ideal manhood closed in real man' ? And the contradictions

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involved in what he says are reinforced by all the resources of a masterly poet.

Escapism

"The final passage is one of literature's grandest, Churchillian in its rhetoric and resolve." Its immense dignity and power of matter and manner move one deeply, as Ulysses means them to do, and continue to do so after many readings. Nevertheless, Tennyson has already established an ambiguous attitude towards his hero, one which forces our recognition of depths below the dazzling surface. The verse is measured and stately, but it also undercuts the surface strength with the 'poetical decorativeness' and melancholy music of lines like :—

> *The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks :*
> *The long day wanes : the slow moon climbs ; the deep*
> *Moans round with many voices.*

The lines' slow movement and elegiac quality help to stress the element of the escapist and suicidal in Ulysses' motives. So do other things, notably the ambiguity of image and symbol. Ulysses sets out at night (one would surely expect dawn in a work descriptive simply of romantic grandeur). Is the sea calling to a journey of renewal and life, or dreamful ease and death ? Is it the sea of the end of *Locksley Hall*, or its other seas of escape ? Certainly the seas here are not the 'sounding furrows' Ulysses calls them ; no 'mighty wind arises roaring seaward', the landscape is still, the vessel only puffs her sail, the dark seas gloom and moan. Are the Happy Isles the Avilion of *Mort D' Arthur*, a land of renewal, or Lotosland and 'summer isles of Eden'? The final paragraph involves much more than a man braving the struggle of life, for the atmosphere is redolent of death, linked now not primarily with Ithaca as earlier, but with the world beyond—an island that began as a kind of sterile Shalott has become the England of the political poems. And is it accidental that the glorious last line should irresistibly summon up the shade of Milton's Satan with his, 'courage never to submit or yield'?

The Poem : Its Artistic Merits

Ulysses is a noble poem concerned with character delineation rather than with the narration or action. It displays Tennyson's command over language and his felicity of phrasing. He has said what he had to say in the fewest possible words. This makes the diction terse and epigrammatic. Many of the lines of the poem have passed into common, everyday proverbs. Thus we have : *To follow knowledge like a sinking star"* ; *"to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield"*, etc. Tennyson was a consummate artist and he chooses his words both with reference to their sense and their sound. Music is created by the clever use of alliteration, liquid consonants *'l'*, *'m'*

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and '*n*' and the bringing together of a number of vowel sounds, as in the following :

There lies the port, the vessel puffs her sail,
There gloom the dark broad seas.

The poem is written in blank verse which, specially in the last lines, acquires almost a Miltonic grandeur, and sweep and majesty of movement.

(c) Critical Notes, Comments, Explanations, etc.

Lines 1—17 : Substance

King Ulysses has been living in Ithaca for some time. He is tired of his idle life. He is used to a life of travel and adventure, and cannot rest away from travel. So he would like to set sail again and visit new countries, and have fresh experiences.

Ulysses—Ulysses or Odysseus was the legendary King of Ithaca in Greece. He was one of the heroes of the Trojan War (The Trojan War was fought between the Greeks and the Trojans. Prince Paris of Troy eloped with Queen Helen of Greece. The Greeks attacked Troy to bring back Helen. The war continued for ten years and the city of Troy was destroyed). The story of his adventures has been narrated by Homer, the great epic poet of Greece, in his epic *Odysseus.*

It little profits—it is of no good. *An idle King*—a king leading a peaceful life without any adventures.

It little profits.....king—King Ulysses has returned from the war of Troy, and has been leading an idle life in Ithaca for some time. He is tired of his idle life and wants to set sail again. In this poem he addresses his sailors and companions, gives arguments in favour of a life of travel and adventure, and asks them to set sail again with him.

Still hearth—calm and quiet home.

Barren crags—the rocky island of Ithaca ; unproductive rocks.

Matched with—in the company of. *Aged wife*—his wife Penelope who had grown old like him.

Mete and dole—administer ; rule. *Unequal laws*—unjust laws.

Savage race—uncivilised people of Ithaca.

That hoard—who are miserly and who hoard wealth. *And sleep and feed*—live a useless life, like animals.

Know not me—do not understand my real nature.

Rest from travel—cannot rest without travel and adventure.

I will drink.....lees—I will like to enjoy my life to the full.

Through scudding drifts—clouds moving across the sky.

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The rainy Hyades—Hyades, a Constellation (group of stars), was supposed to cause rain. Hence 'rainy'.

Vext—made stormy. *Dim*—dark, because the sky was overcast with clouds.

I am become a name—I have become famous.

Roaming—wandering ; voyaging from one place to another. *Hungry heart*—eager for adventure. *Much have I seen and known*—I have seen many cities and met many people ; I have gained much experience.

Cities of men and manners—he has visited different cities and met people with different manners and ways of life.

Climates—different countries. *Councils*—advisors to Kings ; ministries.

Myself not least—in all the countries I have visited, I was considered an important person and was suitably honoured.

Drunk—enjoyed. *With my peers*—opponents or enemies as brave and heroic as he himself.

Ringing plains—resounding with the din of battle. *Windy*—where strong winds blow.

Lines 18—24 : Substance

Ulysses has travelled far and wide and has had many adventures. But the more he has travelled and experienced the greater has been his hunger for more knowledge and experience. He considers his present life as dull and useless, and yearns to set sail again and have fresh adventures.

I am a part of all that I have met—his present character and nature is the result of the experiences he has had in the past.

Arch—door ; gateway. *Where through*—through which.

Gleams—shines ; is seen.

That untravelled world—the part of the world which he has not seen.

Margin fades—the margin or end of those unknown lands moves back or recedes, as he travels towards them.

To pause—to stay at one place.

To make an end—to put an end to one's life of travel and adventure.

To rust unburnished—to become dull mentally and inactive physically, like a sword which gets rusted when it is not used.

Explanation : ***Yet all experience.....to breathe were life.***

Ulysses has travelled far and wide, and seen many countries and known many people. Yet his hunger for travel and adventure is not satisfied. He would like to set sail again and have more experience.

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He tells his sailors that whatever experience he had gained so far, was just like a doorway which revealed to him unexplored regions of knowledge and experience whose horizon recedes, the more he travels and the more experience he gains. Knowledge is limitless, and its end can never be reached. His life in Ithaca, without any adventure, is dull. Such a useless life would make him dull mentally and inactive physically. Just as a sword which is not used gets rusted, so also a man who does not have adventures and rests at home in peace becomes dull and inactive. Real life means activity ; merely to breathe is not enough.

Lines 25—32 : Substance

Knowledge is infinite, and human life is short. He has only a few more years to live, and he would devote them to gain more knowledge and experience. He would follow knowledge, like a sinking star.

Life piled on life—not one life, but a series of lives. *Too little*—would not be enough.

Eternal silence—the silence of death.

But every hour.....silence—Every hour spent in the acquisition of knowledge is so much time saved from death. A man may be said really to live only during the time that he passes in the acquisition of knowledge.

Something more—a bit of fresh knowledge that may be acquired.

A bringer of new things—every hour of human life is valuable, if it brings fresh knowledge and experience.

Vile it were—it would be mean and cowardly on my part.

Three suns—three years ; he has grown old and may be expected to live only for two or three years more.

To store and hoard myself—to conserve or save my energies ; to seek to protect my life from danger.

Gray—old. *Yearning in desire*—craving for more knowledge and experience.

To follow knowledge like a sinking star—to travel in the pursuit of more knowledge and experience upto the very end of his days, just like a star which moves across the sky till it sets. It is one of those lines of Tennyson that have become proverbial.

Beyond the utmost bound of human thought—He would like to acquire more knowledge, even more than can be imagined by the human mind.

Utmost bounds—farthest limits.

Lines 33—43 : Substance

King Ulysses is determined to leave his kingdom to his son

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Telemachus, and himself set sail to acquire more knowledge and experience.

Telemachus—the son of Ulysses, who waited patiently for the return of his father for full twenty years.

The sceptre and the isle—the kingdom of the island. He would be my successor and rule over the island when I am gone.

Discerning—prudent ; wise enough. *To fulfil this labour*—to discharge the duties of a king.

By slow prudence—through wise measures of reform introduced gradually.

To make mild—to civilise. *A rugged people*—the uncivilised people of the island.

Through soft degrees—gradually.

Subdue them to the useful and the good—train them and direct their energies to what is good and useful.

Centred in the sphere of common duties—he is interested in the performance of the ordinary duties of life.

Decent—sufficiently careful.

In offices of tenderness—in his duty toward his mother. He is sure to take care of his old mother with love and kindness.

To pay meet adoration—to worship in a suitable manner : to perform all due rites of worship. *Meet*—proper.

Household gods—gods who are worshipped in the family.

He works his work, I mine—he will perform the ordinary duties of life in which he is interested, while Ulysses himself will set sail and have fresh adventures and gain more knowledge. Thus the father and the son are well-contrasted.

Lines 44—53 : Substance

Ulysses exhorts his sailors to set sail with him. They have faced dangers together with a cheerful heart, and together they have grown old. But before they die, they would have fresh adventures and achieve something noble, really worthy of them.

The vessel puffs her sail—the sails of their ship are bulging with wind. The wind is favourable, and so they must not delay.

Gloom—are to be seen in the surrounding darkness.

Mariners—sailors. *Souls*—brave spirits. *Wrought*—achieved.

Thought with me—have held the same views. There has been a perfect union of minds between them.

Frolic—cheerful. *Took*—accepted.

The thunder and the sunshine—both fair and foul weather.

Opposed—faced. *Free*—free from care and fear. *Opposed..... forcheads*—faced dangers and difficulties with bold and cheerful hearts.

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Closes all—puts an end to all human efforts.

Ere the end—before death.

Some work of noble note—some noble and heroic deed. *Not unbecoming*—worthy of.

That strove with gods—according to Greek mythology the gods took sides with the Trojans in the war of Troy. Ulysses and his followers were brave enough to battle with the gods in the Trojan war.

Lines 54—61 : Substance

Ulysses is determined to sail beyond the Western horizon. He will travel and have adventures, till the very last moment.

From the rocks—*i.e.* from the houses built on the rocks.

Wanes—is coming to an end.

The deep—the ocean.

Moans round with many voices—In imagination Ulysses hears the myriad voices of the sea with its eternal note of sadness.

Sitting well in order—sitting well disciplined in a line. *Smite the sounding furrows*—strike the roaring waves of the sea with our oars.

Holds—is. *Beyond the sunset*—beyond the western horizon where the sun sets.

The baths.....stars—the western horizon where the stars go down into the sea.

Lines 62—70 : Substance

Ulysses is determined, "to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield" upto the very end of his days. He will travel and have adventures till he dies.

It may be—it is just possible. *The gulfs*—the waves ; the whirlpools.

Will wash us down—we may be drowned in the ocean.

It may be—but it is also possible that.

The Happy Isles—according to Greek mythology, the abode of their dead heroes. The islands were supposed to lie somewhere in the Western ocean.

The great Achilles—one of the Greek heroes of the Trojan Wars. Homer's *Iliad* gives an account of his heroic deeds.

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Though much is taken—though they have seen and experienced much. *Much abides*—much more still remains to be seen and experienced.

Moved earth and heaven—achieved even the impossible.

One equal temper of heroic hearts—they are all equally brave and heroic.

By time—by age. *Fate*—it is human fate to grow old with age.

To strive, to seek.....to yield—they are determined to make efforts, to search and find out new lands, and never to admit defeat. The line has become proverbial.

———

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The Island of Shalott lies in the Pleasantt River which flows direct to the City of Camelot, the Capital of King Arthur.

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18

The Lady of Shalott

(*a*) THE POEM

Part I

On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye,
That clothe the wold and meet the sky; extend up to the horizon
And thro' the field the road runs by
To many-tower'd Camelot; high buildings of Camelot -
And up and down the people go,
Gazing where the lilies blow
Round an island there below, in the river
The island of Shalott.

Willows whiten, aspens quiver, Aspen leaf tremble in slight breeze
Little breezes dusk and shiver darkens - causes ripples
Thro' the wave that runs for ever gentle breeze blows over the river which
By the island in the river causes ripples over the river & dark shadows -
Flowing down to Camelot.
Four gray walls, and four gray towers,
Overlook a space of flowers, Expanse of -
And the silent isle imbowers Shelters within -
The Lady of Shalott.

By the margin, willow-veil'd, Concealed from view by willow trees
Slide the heavy barges trail'd big boats - made heavy by cargo - pulled (drawn)
By slow horses; and unhail'd no shouts of welcome - veiled from view
The shallop flitteth silken-sail'd boat -
Skimming down to Camelot: floating down
But who hath seen her wave her hand? None has seen her waving her
Or at the casement seen her stand? hand to passer by -
Or is she known in all the land, None knows her in the land.
The Lady of Shalott?

Only reapers, reaping early
In among the bearded barley, with husk growing over it -

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Hear a song that echoes cheerly
From the river winding clearly,
Down to tower'd Camelot ;
And by the moon the reaper weary,
Piling sheaves in uplands airy,
Listening, whispers "'Tis the fairy
Lady of Shalott."

PART II

There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colors gay.
She has heard a whisper say,
A curse is on her if she stay
To look down to Camelot.
She knows not what the curse may be,
And so she weaveth steadily,
And little other care hath she,
The Lady of Shalott.

And moving thro' a mirror clear
That hangs before her all the year,
Shadows of the world appear.
There she sees the highway near
Winding down to Camelot ;
There the river eddy whirls,
And there the surly village-churls,
And the red cloaks of market girls
Pass onward from Shalott.

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,
An abbot on an ambling pad,
Sometimes a curly shepherd-lad,
Or long-hair'd page in crimson clad,
Goes by to tower'd Camelot ;
And sometimes thro' the mirror blue
The knights come riding two and two :
She hath no loyal knight and true,
The Lady of Shalott.

But in her web she still delights
To weave the mirror's magic sights,
For often thro' the silent nights
A funeral, with plumes and lights
And music, went to Camelot ;
Or when the moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed.
"I am half sick of shadows," said
The Lady of Shalott.

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PART III

Very close.
As bow-shot from her bower-eaves near to her mansion
He rode between the barley-sheaves, Rush
The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves,
Shone And flamed upon the brazen greaves made of bronze - armour to
Of bold Sir Lancelot. Protect below knees.
A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd one of the Knights of Arthurs Round Table
To a lady in his shield, Picture of a lady on Shield (Symbolic)
That sparkled on the yellow field was ever ready to help a lady
Beside remote Shalott. in distress.

Cluster of The gemmy bridle glitter'd free, Studded with gems.
Like to some branch of stars we see
Hung in the golden Galaxy. full of Shining stars.
The bridle bells rang merrily
As he rode down to Camelot ;
And from his blazon'd baldric slung belt over the Shoulder and under the arm.
A mighty silver bugle hung,
And as he rode his armor rung, Produced a ringing Sounds.
Beside remote Shalott.

All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick-jewell'd shone the saddle-leather,
The helmet and the helmet-feather
Burn'd like one burning flame together, Shone very Clearly -
As he rode down to Camelot ;
As often thro' the purple night,
Below the starry clusters bright, Bright Cluster of Stars
Some bearded meteor, trailing light, the trail of Shine of the armour
Moves over still Shalott. is compared to meteor.

His broad clear brow in sunlight glow'd ;
On burnish'd hooves his war-horse trode ; hooves Covered with Shining Silk Sauces
From underneath his helmet flow'd
His coal black curls as on he rode. His very black Hairs -
As he rode down to Camelot.
From the bank and from the river
He flash'd into the crystal mirror, His figure was reflected in the mirror of the Lady.
"Tirra lirra", by the river
Sang Sir Lancelot.

She left the web, she left the loom,
She made three paces thro' the room,
She saw the water-lily bloom, She fell in love first Sight to Lancelot)
She saw the helmet and the plume, She looked down the room.
She look'd down to Camelot.
Out flew the web and floated wide The web was broken.
The mirror crack'd from side to side The mirror Cracked.
"The curse is come upon me," cried
The Lady of Shalott. She realised that the Curse had
Befallen her as a punishment for looking
down the window -

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PART IV

In the stormy east-wind straining,
The pale yellow woods were waning,
The broad stream in his banks complaining,
Heavily the low sky raining
Over tower'd Camelot ;
Down she came and found a boat
Beneath a willow left afloat,
And round about the prow she wrote
The Lady of Shalott.

And down the river's dim expanse
Like some bold seer in a trance,
Seeing all his own mischance—
With a glassy countenance
Did she look to Camelot.
And at the closing of the day
She loosed the chain, and down she lay ;
The broad stream bore her far away,
The Lady of Shalott.

Lying, robed in snowy white
That loosely flew to left and right—
The leaves upon her falling light—
Thro' the noises of the night
She floated down to Camelot ;
And as the boat-head wound along
The willowy hills and field among,
They heard her singing her last song,
The Lady of Shalott.

Heard a carol, mournful, holy,
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Till her blood was frozen slowly,
And her eyes were darken'd wholly
Turn'd to tower'd Camelot.
For ere she reach'd upon the tide
The first house by the water-side,
Singing in her song she died,
The Lady of Shalott.

Under tower and balcony,
By garden-wall and gallery,
A gleaming shape she floated by,
Dead-pale between the houses high,
Silent into Camelot.
Out upon the wharfs they came,
Knight and burgher, lord and dame,
And round the prow they read her name,
The Lady of Shalott.

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Who is this ? and what is here ?
And in the lighted palace near
Died the sound of royal cheer ;
And they cross'd themselves for fear,
All the knights at Camelot ;
But Lancelot mused a little space ;
He said, "She has a lovely face ;
God in his mercy lend her grace,
The Lady of Shalott."

(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION : CRITICAL SUMMARY

Publication of the Poem

The Lady of Shalott was first published in the volume of 1833. It was published again in the Volume of 1842, in a much revised and improved form. The changes which Tennyson made show that the poet's art has matured considerably, and he has acquired full control over his material.

Its Source

The poem shows that Tennyson was pre-occupied even as early as 1833 with the cycle of stories which centre round the legendary figure of King Arthur. Some critics have suggested that some Italian romance is the source of the poem. It might be that Tennyson was familiar with some Italian version of the story, but more probably the immediate source of Tennyson must have been **Sir Thomas Malory's** *Morte D, Arthur* with which Tennyson was familiar. Later on in the *Idylls of the Kings* he used this very material for another story entitled, *Elaine, the Lily Maid of Astolat.* Elaine also dies of love for Sir Lancelot. The poem is a pure fantasy, entirely the result of the poet's imagination working on a legend which fascinated him at the time.

Critical Summary

The Lady of Shalott is a narrative poem in four parts. The first part of the poem gives us the scenic background to the story. The island of Shalott lies in a pleasant river which flows down to the City of Camelot, the Capital of King Arthur. On both sides of the river are spread fields of barley and of rye. Beautiful lily flowers grow there. The mysterious Lady of Shalott lives all alone in her stately mansion. The people who work in the fields have often heard her sing. But nobody has ever seen her, for she never stands at the window and waves her hand.

The mystery surrounding the Lady of Shalott is suggested in Part I and in the second part we are told further about this strange

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lady. A mysterious whisper had told the lady that a curse would befall her, if she ever looked out towards Camelot. So she has a mirror hanging before her, and she looks at the scenes and sights of the outside world reflected in this river. Day and night she weaves these scenes and sights into a magic web. Sometimes she sees young lovers passing by and then she sadly exclaims, "I am half-sick of shadows". *In this way suggestion is thrown out that she is sexually frustrated.*

Time passed. One day Sir Lancelot, one of the knights of Arthur's Round Table, passes close by the mansion of the Lady of Shalott. The Lady sees his reflection in the mirror. Fascinated, she looks out. At once the web flows out, and the mirror cracks from side to side. The Lady knows that the curse has befallen her.

Part IV describes the death of the Lady of Shalott. Her end is pathetic. She lies down in a boat, which is carried by the water of the river to Camelot. There the people come in large numbers to look at her. They find that she is dead. Lancelot, too, looks at her and muses over her beauty.

A Medievel Romance

The Lady of Shalott is a medieval romance and the poet has created the medieval atmosphere with light, skilful touches. The language has the simplicity of the medieval ballad-makers and there are frequent repetitions, in the manner of the ballad-makers. The Middle Ages were times of chivalry, knight-errantry, woman worship and magic and witchcraft. The setting is medieval, King Arthur and his knights living in Camelot have been brought in. Sir Lancelot wears a blazoned baldric with the figure of a Knight knealing before his lady, and the Lady of Shalott regrets that she has no Knight, true and loyal. The supernatural element has also been brought in through the mysterious curse on the lady, the magic web which she weaves, and the way in which the curse befalls her and she dies.

Its Artistic Merits : Word-pictures

The Lady of Shalott is one of the finest and most interesting narrative poems in the English language, and is to be read and enjoyed as such. The narrative is swift and straight-forward with no digressions. The poem is to be enjoyed for its beautiful, vivid pictures, which pass before the mind's eye in quick succession. There are a number of pictures : the river and the highroad and the fields; the castle on the island, and the room with the lady weaving her magic web, and the moving scene outside reflected in the mirror ; Sir Lancelot riding by, and the lady leaving her room to look after him from the window ; the broken web and the cracked mirror ; the Lady of Shalott, "robed in snowy white," floating down the stream in her boat and singing her last song, and then gliding "dead-pale" between the houses of Camelot, while, "knight and burgher, lord and dame,"

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come out upon the wharfs to look at her, and Sir Lancelot is stricken with wondering pity. Exquisite and telling similes and metaphors are used to vivify the narrative and to make the readers see with their mind's eye the scene which is being described. One of the most beautiful word pictures in the poem is the one in which Sir Lancelot is likened to a meteor shooting across the sky :

All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick jewell'd shown the saddle leather,
The helmet and the helmet-feather
Burn'd like one burning flame together,
As he rode down to Camelot,
As often thro' the purple night,
Below the starry clusters bright
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
Moved over still Shalott.

The image has been admired by all readers of Tennyson.

The Nature background (Nature is shown in sympathy with human actors).

Throughout, as the narration proceeds, Nature is shown in sympathy with the human actors. It changes in harmony with human moods and emotions. Thus in the beginning, before the curse befalls the Lady, nature is bright and beautiful. The lady is peaceful and happy, and so in harmony with her, nature, too, is gay and well lit. But when the curse befalls her and she is to die, nature, too, changes, and becomes dark and gloomy :

In the stormy east-wind straining,
The pale yellow woods were waning,
The broad stream in his banks complaining,
Heavily the low sky raining.

The tragedy of the Lady of Shalott is thus reflected in Nature, and is in this way intensified.

Music and Melody

The poem is to be enjoyed for its story, for its vivid pictures, and for its music. The language is simple as well as musical. Music has been created through the use of a number of skilful devices. There is artistic use of alliteration as in, "*Four gray walls, and four gray towers*", and in, "*only reapers, reaping early.*" There is also artistic use of medial rhymes as in, "Long fields of *barley*, and of *rye*" or in, "Chanted *loudly*, chanted *lowly*." At other times there is skilful manipulation of liquid consonants *'l'*, *'m'*, *'n'*, etc., as in the following :

Hung in the golden galaxy,
The bridal bells rang merrily

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There might be a false rhyme here and there, but on the whole Tennyson's rhyming is perfect and justifies the praise of the critic who writes, "*Nowhere did Tennyson excel the haunting music of the poem.*"

Symbolic Significance

While **Gerard Manley Hopkin** praises the poem as, "pure, sensuous poetry", to be enjoyed for its romance, for its pictures, and for its music, there are others who are not content to take it as a glittering fairy tale, and interpret it allegorically. The poem is certainly not a modern allegory or symbolic poem, but we may, if we so desire, discover in it a hidden moral significance. The key to its moral is provided by the line,

'I am half-sick of shadows', said
The Lady of Shalott.

In other words, the story shows that a life of isolation, cut off from reality, is bound to result in frustration and tragedy. *The day-dreams of an artist are shattered as soon as they come in contact with outside reality.* The Lady thus symbolises the retired artist or poet living in his ivory tower, her web the work of art on which he works, and the curse, the contact with harsh reality. As soon as the artist faces the reality of life, his dreams are shattered. Writes **J. B. Steane** in this connection, "*The Lady of Shalott*, then, is not an allegory, though, as in *Mariana*, the images sometimes have the power of symbols. The mirror, for instance, suggests much beyond its role as an item in a fairy story. For as the Lady weaves, 'the mirror's magic sights', in her tapestry she is herself partly taking the role of the artist, and her existence in the island castle has something in common with the artist's apartness. Mareover, as she sees reality only through her mirror, so the artist may tend to experience vicariously, drawing his knowledge not from direct contact, but from other works of art. He has his own special nature, like the Lady ; partly an affliction to him, this sense of difference, partly a blessing and possibly the very condition of his being an artist at all. For life in the ordinary day-to-day world he may be all unfit, as was the Lady, and, for him as for her, only disaster may follow the attempt to break bounds. This is not 'the message' of *The Lady of Shalott*, but it is, I think, a part of the ground out of which the poem grew."

Conclusion

The poem thus becomes a moral tale dealing with the dangers and inadequacy of an isolated existence. The poet rarely again caught the power, "*to fuse image, sound and idea so that the one was the other.*"

(c) Critical Notes, Comments, etc.

PART I

Substance

The first part of the poem gives us the scenic background to the

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story. The island of Shalott lies in a pleasant river which flows down to the City of Camelot, the capital of King Arthur. On both sides of the river are spread fields of barley and of rye. Beautiful lily flowers grow there. The mysterious Lady of Shalott lives all alone in her stately mansion. The people who work in the fields have often heard her sing. But nobody has ever seen her, for she never stands at the window and waves her hand.

Stanza I

Clothe—are spread over. *Wold*—the open country. *Meet the sky*—extend upto the horizon.

Many-tower'd Camelot—the city of Camelot with its splendid buildings. It was the capital of the legendary King Arther. He lived there with his brave Knights of the Round Table.

There below—*i.e.* in the river.

Stanza 2

Willows whiten—"by showing the underside of the leaf" **(Fowler)**. Willow trees look white when the wind blows and over-turns their leaves.

Aspens quiver—the aspen leaf quivers and trembles even in the slightest breeze.

Dusk—darken. *Shiver*—cause ripples.

Little breezes.....the wave—gentle breezes blow over the waters of the river. As a result quivering dancing ripples are caused on the surface of the river which in their turn cast dark shadows.

Camelot—the capital of the legendary King Arthur. Here King Arthur lived with his brave Knights of the Round Table.

Space—expanse of.

Imbowers—shelters within it ; it is here that the mysterious Lady of Shallot lives.

Stanza 3.

Margin—bank of the river. *Willow-Veil'd*—concealed from view by the willow trees growing on the banks of the river.

Slide—move ; float. *Barges*—big boats. *Heavy*—because they are laden with cargo. *Trailed*—pulled ; drawn.

Slow horses—horses moving slowly (because they have to pull heavy boats).

Unhail'd—without being greeted by shouts of welcome, because it is concealed from view.

Shallop—a boat. *Flitteth*—flies ; moves lightly.

Skimming—floating.

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But who hath.....her stand—nobody has ever seen the Lady of Shalott wave her hand as a sign of greeting to the passers-by, or stand at the window looking out. Thus the mystery surrounding the Lady is suggested.

Or is she known.....Shalott—Nobody in the land has even seen her.

Stanza 4

Early—early in the morning. *Bearded barley*—with husk growing over it.

Cheerly—cheerfully. The Lady of Shalott sings a cheerful song.

Winding clearly—the clear water of the river flowing in a zig-zag manner.

Tower'd Camelot—Camelot having majestic buildings.

Piling sheaves—heaping of bundles of barley which they have reaped during the day.

The fairy—the use of the word 'fairy' suggests the mysterious, elfine nature of the Lady.

PART II

Substance

A mysterious whisper had told the lady that a curse would befall her, if she ever looked out towards Camelot. So she has a mirror hanging before her, and she looks at the scenes and sights of the outside world reflected in this mirror. Day and night she weaves these scenes and sights into a magic web. Sometimes she sees young lovers passing by and then she sadly exclaims, "I am half-sick of shadows". In this way a suggestion is thrown out that she is sexually frustrated.

Stanza 1

Magic—the use of the word 'magic' is suggestive of some supernatural influence surrounding the Lady.

With colors gay—with threads of bright colour.

She has heard a whisher say—some mysterious, supernatural being has whispered to her. *Is on her*—will befall her. *Look down to*—look towards.

Stanza 2

Shadows of the world appear—scenes and sights of the outside world are reflected in the mirror hanging before the lady. She can look at these "shadows" merely, and not at the "reality" outside.

Highway—road. *Winding*—going in a zig-zag manner.

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There—*i e.* are reflected in a mirror. *The river eddy whirls*—the little whirlpools formed in the river are reflected in the mirror hanging in front of the Lady.

Surly—ill-tempered, wearing a look of irritation. *Village-churls*—rustics ; peasants.

Stanza 3

Troop—group. *Abbot*—the head of a monastry. *Ambling*—moving slowly. *Pad*—horse.

Curly—having curly hair. *Page*—a boy-servant. *Crimson clad*—dressed in a bright red livery.

Two and two—in groups of two.

She hath no.....true—the Lady of Shalott has no lover. Her loneliness is thus suggested.

Stanza 4

The mirror's magic sights—the scenes and sights of the outside world reflected in the mirror. They have a magical attraction and charm for her.

A funeral—a funeral procession. *With plumes*—Knights wearing plumes or feathers in their head-dresses. They form a part of the procession.

Lately wed—recently married.

'I am half-sick of shadows'—the Lady was fed up with always looking at the reflection or shadows in her mirror. She yearned for the reality of the outside world.

PART III

Substance

Time passed. One day Sir Lancelot one of the Knights of Arthur's Round Table passed close by the mansion of the Lady of Shalott. The Lady saw his reflection in the mirror. Fascinated, she looked out. At once the web flew out, and the mirror cracked from side to side. The Lady knew that the curse had befallen her.

Stanza 1

A bow-shot—quite close to ; at a stone's throw. *Bower-eaves*—eaves of her mansion *i.e.*, near to her mansion. *Eaves*—the edge or lower border of a roof.

Flamed upon—shone brightly as its rays fell upon. *Brazen*—made of brass. *Greaves*—armour for the leg below the knee.

In his shield—this was the picture curved on his shield. The picture was symbolic. It indicated that Sir Lancelot was a chivalric Knight, ever ready to serve women in distress.

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Stanza 2

Gemmy—adjective from 'gem'. Tennyson is fond of using such adjectives formed from Nouns. *Gemmy bridle*—bridle studded with gems.

Branch—cluster ; group of. *Galaxy*—the Milky way, full of bright, shining stars. Tennyson calls the starlight 'golden'. It is the colour which he habitually sees in light and flame. The picturesqueness of the comparison is to be noted.

Baldric—a belt worn over one shoulder and under the other arm.

Blazon'd—decorated with heraldic devices i.e. designs expressing the heroism, valour, birth and rank of the person concerned. Such designs were generally painted on shields.

His armour rung—his armour produced a ringing sound.

Stanza 3

Helmet—the head-dress.

Burn'd like.....together—as the sunlight fell on the steel headdress of Sir Lancelot, it shone brightly like a flame of fire.

Starry clusters bright—the group of stars shining brightly in the sky.

Bearded meteor—a shooting star followed by a trail of light which is here being compared to a beard.

As often thro'h.....over still Shalott—it is a beautiful, picturesque simile. Sir Lancelot riding by Shallot with his armour shining in the sun is being likened to a meteor with a trail of bright light shooting across the sky.

Stanza 4

Glow'd—shone brightly.

Burnish'd hooves—hooves fitted with shining steel shoes.

Trode—tread.

He flashed into—as Sir Lancelot rode along the bank of the river, he was reflected in the clear mirror hanging in the room of the lady.

Crystal—clear.

'Tirra lirra'—this signifies that the Knight was singing merrily.

Stanza 5

She saw the water-lily bloom—she had fallen in love with Sir Lancelot at first sight. Fascinated, she forgot about the curse and looked out of the window.

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Out flew the web, etc—the curse befell the Lady. *Floated wide*—flew far away in the wind.

Is come upon me—has fallen upon me.

PART IV

Substance

This part describes the death of the Lady of Shalott. Her end is pathetic. She lies down in a boat, which is carried by the water of the river to Camelot. There the people come in large numbers to look at her. They find that she is dead. Lancelot, too, looks at her and muses over her beauty.

Stanza 1

Straining—struggling against the storm which was blowing at the time.

Waning—looking pale and tired.

Complaining—flowing with a moaning sound as if in great suffering.

In the stormy east-wind.....low sky raining—the mood of nature has changed.

In the poetry of Tennyson, Nature is sympathetic to man. Instead of the brilliant sunshine of the first three parts, we have stormy east wind and pale, waning woods. In this way the pathos of Lady Shalott's life is intensified.

The prow—the front part of the boat.

Stanza 2

Dim—dark, because the sky was cloudy.

Expanse—wide stretch of water.

Seer—a prophet; a sage. *In a trance*—in his meditation. *Mischance*—the misfortune that is likely to befall him.

Glassy countenance—with a rigid, fixed expression on her face.

Like some bold seer in a trance—the Lady knew that the curse had come upon her. She is here being compared to a sage who can forsee the future, and so knows of the misfortune that is about to befall him.

Stanza 3

Light—lightly.

The boat head—the prow of the boat.

Wormed along—floated along the river in a zig-zag manner.

The Willowy hills—hills over-grown with willows. Note Tennyson's habit of coining adjectives from nouns.

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Stanza 4

Carol—song.

Her eyes.....wholly—she lost her eye-sight completely.

Stanza 5

Burgher—ordinary citizens. *Dame*—lady.

Stanza 6

Who is this ? and what is here ?—the people did not know who the lady was, and so they inquired from each other.

Died the sound of royal cheer—King Arthur and his Knights were enjoying in the palace nearby. They put an end to their merry-making as they heard of the death of the Lady of Shalott.

Crossed themselves—made a sign of the cross, according to Christian custom. *Cross* is the holy sign of the Christians.

Mused a little space—stood thinking for a short while.

God in his mercy lend her grace—may God bless her and be merciful to her. *She has a lovely face*—this reflects the character of Sir Lancelot. He thinks of her beauty and not of the tragedy that has befallen her. He is a knight given to the pleasures of wine and women.

———

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19

Morte D'Arthur

(*a*) THE POEM

So ALL day long the noise of battle roll'd
Among the mountains by the winter sea,
Until King Arthur's table, man by man,
Had fallen in Lyonnesse about their lord,
King Arthur ; then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
Sir Bedivere, the last of all his knights,
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land.
On one side lay the ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :
"The sequal of to-day unsolders all
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep
They sleep—the men I loved. I think that we
Shall never more, at any future time,
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
Walking about the gardens and the halls
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.

I perish by the people which I made,—
Tho' Merlin swore that I should come again
To rule once more—but let what will be,
I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm
That without help I cannot last till morn.
Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,
Which was my pride ; for thou rememberest how
In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,

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Holding the sword—and how I row'd across
And took it, and have worn it, like a king ;
And, wheresoever I am sung or told
In aftertime, this also shall be known.
But now delay not ; take Excalibur,
And fling him far into the middle mere ;
Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word."
To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere :
"It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,
Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm.
A little thing may harm a wounded man.
Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word."
So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
By zigzag paths and juts of pointed rock,
Came on the shining levels of the lake.
There drew he forth the brand Excalibur
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt ;
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz lights, and jacinth-work
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long
That both his eyes were dazzled, as he stood,
This way and that dividing the swift mind,
In act to throw ; but at the last it seem'd
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd
There in the many-knotted water-flags,
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.
So strode he back slow to the wounded king.
Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :
"Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave ?
What is it thou hast seen, or what hast heard ?"
And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :
"I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag."
To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale :
"Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,
Not rendering true answer, as beseem'd
Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight ;
For surer sign had follow'd, either hand,
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing

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I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word."
Then went Sir Bedivere the second time
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,
Counting the dewy pebbles, fix'd in thought ;
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote
His palms together, and he cried aloud :
"And if indeed I cast the brand away,
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost forever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.
What good should follow this, if this were done ?
What harm, undone ? deep harm to disobey,
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.
Were it well to obey then, if a king demand
An act unprofitable, against himself ?
The king is sick, and knows not what he does,
What record, or what relic of my lord
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
And rumors of a doubt ? but were this kept,
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,
Some one might show it at a joust of arms,
Saying, "King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,
Wrought by the lonely maiden of the lake ;
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
Upon the hidden bases of the hills.'
So might some old man speak in the aftertime
To all the people, winning reverence ;
But now much honor and much fame were lost."
So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,
And hid Excalibur the second time,
And so strode back slow to the wounded king.
Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily ;
"What is it thou hast seen, or what hast heard ?"
And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :
"I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds."
To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath :
"Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,
Unknightly, traitor-hearted ! Woe is me !
Authority forgets a dying king,
Laid widow'd of the power in his eye
That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,
For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,
In whom should meet the offices of all,
Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt ;
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,

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And the third time may prosper, get thee hence ;
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
I will arise and slay thee with my hands."
Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
Among the bulrush-beds, and clutch'd the sword,
And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendor of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the northern sea.
So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur ;
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm
Cloth'd in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.
And lightly went the other to the king.
Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath :
"Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.
Speak out ; what is it thou hast heard, or seen ?"
And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :
"Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men,
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.
Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him ;
But when I look'd again, behold an arm,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere."
And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard :
"My end draws nigh ; 'tis time that I were gone.
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,
And bear me to the margin ; yet I fear
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die."
So saying, from the pavement he half rose,
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere
Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,
And would have spoken, but he found not words,
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,
And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs.
But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the king,

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Muttering and murmuring at his ear, "Quick, quick!
I fear it is too late, and I shall die."
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd,
Larger than human on the frozen hills.
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.
Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels—
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.
Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them ; and descending they were ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these
Three queens with crowns of gold—and from them rose
A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.
Then murmur'd Arthur, "Place me in the barge,"
And to the barge they came. There those three queens
Put forth their hands, and took the king, and wept.
But she that rose the tallest of them all
And fairest laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands,
And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,
And dropping bitter tears against his brow
Striped with dark blood ; for all his face was white
And colorless, and like the wither'd moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;
And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops
Of onset ; and the light and lustrous curls—
That made his forehead like a rising sun
High from the dais-throne—were parch'd with dust ;
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,
Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
So like a shatter'd column lay the king ;
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.
Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere :
"Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go ?

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Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes ?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have been not since the light that led
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
But now the whole ROUND TABLE is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world;
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds."
And slowly answer'd Arthur from the barge:
"The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
Comfort thyself : what comfort is in me ?
I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within himself make pure! but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend ?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seest—if indeed I go—
For all my mind is clouded with a doubt—
To the island-valley of Avilion;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly, but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound."
So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away.
Here ended Hall, and our last light, that long
Had wink'd, and threaten'd darkness flared and fell;
At which the parson, sent to sleep with sound,
And waked with silence, grunted "Good!" but we

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Sat rapt: it was the tone with which he read—
Perhaps some modern touches here and there
Redeem'd it from the charge of nothingness—
Or else we loved the man, and prized his work ;
I know not ; but we sitting, as I said,
The cock crew loud, as at that time of year
The lusty bird takes every hour for dawn.
Then Francis, muttering, like a man ill-used,
"There now—that's nothing!" drew a little back,
And drove his heel into the smoulder'd log,
That sent a blast of sparkles up the flue,
And so to bed, where yet in sleep I seem'd
To sail with Arthur under looming shores,
Point after point ; till on to dawn, when dreams
Begin to feel the truth and stir of day,
To me, methought, who waited with the crowd,
There came a bark that, blowing forward, bore
King Arthur, like a modern gentleman
Of stateliest port ; and all the people cried,
"Arthur is come again : he cannot die."
Then those that stood upon the hills behind
Repeated—"Come again, and thrice as fair ;"
And, further inland, voices echoed—"Come
With all good things, and war shall be no more."
At this a hundred bells began to peal,
That with the sound I woke, and heard indeed
The clear church-bells ring in the Christmas morn.

(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION
CRITICAL SUMMARY

Its Publication

Morte D'Arthur, an exquisite narrative poem, was first published in 1842. Later on it was enlarged a little and incorporated in *The Idylls of the King* as *The Passing of Arthur*. It gives an account of the death of Arthur and is among the most popular poems of Tennyson.

Its Source : The Arthurian legend

King Arthur was a semi-legendary English Chieftain or General who lived about the fifth century A.D. An account of his life and career was first given by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his famous *History of Great Britain*. Later writers much developed and exaggerated this account. As a result, Arthur became a mythical king who founded the society of *the Knights of the Round Table* and waged a war against evil and wickedness. In the 15th century, Sir Thomas Malory worked

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the story of Arthur into his famous prose romance *Morte D'Arthur*. This prose romance proved very popular. It captured the imagination of poets like Tennyson, Morris, Swinburne, etc. It is the chief source of Tennyson's poem.

Critical Summary

Tennyson's *Morte D'Arthur* gives us an account of the passing away of Arthur. King Arthur founded the institution of the Knights of the Round Table, united the warring tribes and made them into a strong and powerful people. He fought many battles and won many victories, while no enemy could defeat him ; his own house was his undoing. His own nephew, Modred, rebelled against him. A decisive and bloody battle was fought with him at Lyonnesse, somewhere in the dim west. In this battle Modred was defeated and killed, but all the Knights of King Arthur, except Sir Bedivere, were also killed. The King himself was fatally wounded.

Sir Bedivere carried the wounded King to a nearby Chapel for safety. The King knew that he would not live long so he asked Sir Bedivere to throw his sword, Excalibur, into the nearby lake. It was from this lake that a mystic hand had risen out and given him the magic sword. With it the King was to wage a war against evil and then was to return it to the lake from where he had got it.

Sir Bedivere went with the sword to the lake in obedience to the wishes of his King. But when he took out the sword to fling it into the lake, he was so much tempted by its precious hilt, studded with jewels, that he did not throw it away. Instead, he concealed it in some water-reeds growing on the shore of the lake.

When Sir Bedivere returned, King Arthur asked him if he had carried out his orders. From his reply, the King could at once judge that he was telling a lie. He had not really thrown the sword into the lake. So he ordered Sir Bedivere to go again and carry out his commands. The knight went to the lake a second time. So fascinating was the hilt of the sword, that he was again tempted by it. He decided to keep it back as a fitting memorial of his great King and his noble achievements.

So he hid the sword in the water-reeds a second time, and returned to his King. From his reply, King Arthur at once knew that the sword had not been thrown into the lake. He rebuked the Knight sternly and ordered him to try to perform his duty a third time. If he failed again, he would kill him by his own hands. The third time Sir Bedivere actually ran to the lake, and without looking at the sword, swung it thrice, and with great force threw it towards the lake. It went flashing like lightning. But before it fell into the lake, a hand rose out of the water and drew it in. Then Sir Bedivere returned quickly to his King and told him what he had seen. The King was now satisfied that his wishes had

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been carried out. He felt that his death was fast-appoaching. So he asked his knight and friend to carry him to the shore of the lake.

Sir Bedivere took the dying King Arthur on his back, and walked with him towards the lake. The King breathed with difficulty. He was afraid that he would die before they reached the lake. But Sir Bedivere walked swiftly over ridges and crags and soon reached the lake. There they saw a black ship whose deck was crowded with black-hoodel female forms. Among them were three queens. They cried and wailed loudly. King Arthur was taken on the barge. The tallest of the three Queens placed his head on her lap, and wept bitterly to see the King who was now a mere wreck of his former self.

Sir Bedivere lamented that the old, glorious times were now no more. All the other Knights of the Round Table were dead, and he was left alone in the world. He would now have to live among strangers. However, King Arthur advised him not to grieve, for change is the law of nature and old order always changes giving place to the new. Therefore, instead of mourning and lamenting, he should rather pray for his soul, for much can be achieved through prayer. As for himself, he would now go to the Valley of Avilion where (according to the prophecy of Merlin) his wound would be healed, and he would come again to right the wrongs of the world.

Arthur's barge then sailed away and Bedivere was left standing all alone on the shores of the lake.

The Narration : (*a*) Suspense and Mystery

The story is told through imagery, sombre and solemn in tone, in keeping with its tragic theme. The narration is swift and straightforward. There is no digression, no waste of words, and the interest of the readers is kept up throughout. The element of suspense is introduced through the psychological conflict in Sir Bedivere. All the time the readers are keen to know whether the knight would throw the sword into the lake or not. Further, they want to know why Arthur insists that the sword be thrown into the lake, and what would happen when it is flung as desired by the King. Similarly, mystery surrounds the mystic hand that rises out of the lake as well as the barge and the three Queens with whom Arthur sails away. The future of Arthur whether he would return again after his wound has been healed or he would die, is also shrouded in mystery.

(*b*) **Pathos**

Besides suspense, *Morte D'Arthur* is also strong in the note of pathos. The reader's heart is filled with pity and sympathy at the tragic end of Arthur. He was a heroic king who did heroic deeds but now he lies wounded like a broken pillar, a wreck of his former self. We share Sir Bedivere's feeling of grief at the thought that all

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the Knights of the Round Table are dead, the institution itself has been dissolved, and the noble King himself is fatally wounded. The barge with the wailing Queens in black, the final leaving taking of Arthur and Sir Bedivere, are pathetic and moving in the extreme. His loneliness, frustration, and desolation are fittingly conveyed by the following pathetic lines :

Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull,
Looked one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away.

Artistic Merits (*a*) **Word-pictures**

Tennyson's narrative is extremely picturseque. *The story is told in pictures.* One vivid word-picture follows another in quick succession. In order to vivify his narrative, Tennyson has made effective use of simile and metaphor. The use of Homeric similes imparts variety, grandeur, and elevation to the narrative. Tennyson's sense of colour, his eye for the bright and brilliant, is fittingly conveyed by the following :

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
And over him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt :
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work
Of subtlest jewellery.

And by the following :

The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendor of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the northern sea.

(*b*) **Sound-words ; Music**

In the following lines the effective use of sound words like '*clash*', '*clang*', etc., and the movement of the verse, effectively convey the sense of Sir Bedivere walking rapidly to the lake :

Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels—
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.

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Epigrammatic Terseness

Indeed as **J. H. Fowler** points out to-day we read the poem, *"primarily for the beauty of the story and the landscape and the haunting melody of the verse."* Tennyson was a consummate artist and his artistry is here seen in his word-pictures, in his lanscape painting, in the music and melody of his verse, and in the epigrammatic terseness and condensation of his language. Many of the lines in the poem have passed into everyday household proverbs. They are frequently quoted. We give below only two instances to prove the point :

(*i*) *The old order changeth, yielding place to new,*
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

(*ii*) *More things are wrought by prayer*
Than this world dreams of.

The Atmosphere—Medieval Note

The setting of the story is medieval, and the medieval atmosphere has been created with great art and skill. References to the Knights of the Round Table, and to tournaments in which Arthur fought lance in hand, bring out the chivalry and heroism of the middle ages. The supernaturalism and mystery of those remote ages, their belief in magic and witchcraft, is seen in the magic sword of King Arthur, and the mystic hand which rises out of the lake at his death to take it away. As **J. B. Steane** points out in the poem we have, *"all the medieval wardrobe and scenery : the armed heels, the 'white samite, mystic, wonderful', the brand Excalibur, etc"*.

The Modern Element (*a*) Conflict

But all this medieval peraphernalia constitutes only the background ; the drama which is enacted against this background is essentially Victorian and modern. *The modern element in the poem is seen in the mental conflict that goes on within Sir Bedivere.* He is torn within between his loyalty to his King and his desire to keep back the magnificent and precious sword. It is only after a prolonged struggle that he is able to overcome the temptation.

(*b*) **Allegorical Significance**

The modern element in the poem is also seen in the symbolic and allegorical significance which he has imparted to the story. As one critic points out, King Arthur represents, *"the soul at war with the senses"*. "King Arthur stands for the God-like man, as a kind of dream or hope of what manhood might attain, should it reach its ideal. He expresses the aspiration of the spirit toward perfection in our modern life. He symbolises the struggle of man towards a higher

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life." The mystic Lady of the Lake represents the Church or religion and Excalibur represents spiritual power with which Arthur wages war against Evil. The poem illustrates the truth that change is the law of nature, for without change even good customs corrput the world. Change is necessary for progress, for orderly evolution. The purity of the family is also necessary for human growth and progress. When there is sin and corruption in the family, discord shakes the social fabric and death and destruction are the result. Thus the illicit love of Gunivere and Lancelot and the treachery of Modred result in the dissolution of the society of the Knights of the Round Table and the death of Arthur.

Characterisation—Arthur

There are only two important characters in the poem—King Arthur and Sir Bedivere. The key-notes of King Arthur's character are valour, heroism, gallantry, generosity, religious faith, and high ideals. He has, what Aristotle called, the virtue of magnificence. He is the perfect man, in whom "the higher insticts dominate the lower, and the whole life is governed by the law within." His aim is to establish perfect peace and happiness in the realm, and as peace and happiness are not attainable without purity and discipline, he has founded the society of the Knights of the Round Table, the ideal of which can be summed up in two words, "honour and purity". King Arthur himself lives a life of exemplary purity, and insists upon his knights living pure and chaste lives. His honour is unstained, and no passion has power to make him waver from its call. He is so true that he cannot believe in untruthfulness—so faithful that he is unsuspicious of unfaithfulness. Tennyson has introduced some allegory into the character of Arthur, and has painted him as the rational soul. Though his life's work is ruined—but he is still full of hope and faith :

I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within Himself make pure !

Though the Round Table is dissolved, he is not despondent, for says he,

'The old order changeth yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

"Thus Arthur is royal to the end; he is bright with faith and hope, when he passes away with the weeping queens across the lake."

Sir Bedivere

Sir Bedivere is one of the Knights of the Round Table. He is noted for his faith, loyalty and boldness. 'Bold' is the epithet used for him throughout the poem. He is the last surviving knight of the

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Round Table, who is left alone in the end to serve his king. He has an exceedingly human personality, that appeals to every heart. He is exceedingly loyal and devoted to his king, and when all other knights are dead, he carries the wounded king to a safe place in order to nurse him. The king commands him to go to the lake and throw away his sword Excalibur into water. Sir Bedivere at first hesitates to leave the wounded king, but he goes to the lake in order to execute his king's command. But the beauty of the Excalibur overpowers him; he is tempted by its jewel-studded hilt. So, instead of throwing it away, he conceals it and comes back to Arthur. However, Sir Bedivere is neither greedy nor treacherous. He seeks to preserve Excalibur as a relic of King Arthur. He argues that though it is morally wrong, it is justifiable because his purpose is good. It is certainly a false argument, but it is quite human, and hence we feel sympathy for him. When he is sent for the third time, he closes his eyes and throws the sword far into the lake. In his entire life, he is guilty of one act of disobedience, and that also when he is carried away by a momentary temptation. He feels sincere grief when Arthur is leaving him. Nothing exceeds the pathos of his lamentation :

Ah ! 'my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go.'

(c) Critical Notes, Comments, etc.

Lines 1—12. Substance

In the battle of Lyonnesse, fought between King Arthur and his treacherous nephew, Modred, the King was fatally founded. He was carried by his faithful Knight, Sir Bedivere, to a nearby Chapel.

So—in this way. The poet has already described the battle in which Modred was killed, and the King was fatally wounded.

Roll'd—resounded ; was heard.

The winter sea—the sea in the winter season.

Table—the Knights of the Round Table. They are so called for they sat for their meals at a round table.

Man by man—one after another.

Lyonnesse—"a fabulous country, in extension of Cornwall to the south and west, said to be now covered by the sea." It was here that Arthur had pushed back Modred, who was known as the nephew but with whom Arthur disclaimed all kinship ; it was in Lyonnesse that the fight between Arthur and Modred had taken place, in which Modred was killed and Arthur received his fatal wound.

About—near; close by. *Their Lord*—King Arthur.

The bold Sir Bedivere—Sir Bedivere is one of the knights of the Round Table. 'Bold' is the standing epithet of Sir Bedivere, for

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wherever Sir Bedivere's name is mentioned, this adjective is always used before his name.

Chapel—a small church.

Chancel—the eastern part of a church reserved for the clergy. *The broken cross*—the cross on the church was also broken. In this way the ruin of Sir Arthur and his knights is symbolically represented.

Strait—a narrow strip of land.

A great water—a vast lake.

Lines 13—28. Substance

When King Arthur was taken to the Chapel, he told Sir Bedivere with sorrow that all his Knights were killed and he himself was mortally wounded. He would not live long. So, he asked his faithful Knight to take his sword Excalibur and throw it into the lake. It was given to him by a mystic arm which had risen out of the lake one morning long ago. He had used it bravely like a king. Now that he was dying, he wanted that it should be returned to the mystic lady of the lake who had given it to him.

The sequel of to-day—the result of to-day's battle. *Unsolders all*—breaks up ; ruins all that he had achieved.

Goodliest—noblest. *Fellowship of famous knights*—reference is to the famous Knights of the Round Table. This order or class or society of Knights was founded by King Arthur and they were reputed for their bravery and nobility.

The world holds record—are recorded in history.

Such a sleep, they sleep—they sleep the sleep of death.

Knightly deeds—deeds of heroism performed by the Knights of the Round Table.

Camelot—the legendary capital of King Arthur. *In the days that were*—in the past.

Perish—die. *Which I made*—whom I united and formed into a nation.

Merlin—a famous magician or wizard of the time.

Swore—asserted ; said emphatically.

I should come again—I would be born once again.

But let what ..be—let my future be what it is ; whatever my future may be.

Smitten—wounded. *The helm*—the head-dress. An injury through the head dress would be an injury in the head.

Last—survive ; live.

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Brand—sword. *Excalibur*—King Arthur's magic sword. The Lady of the Lake, 'who knew a subtler magic than Merlin', gave this huge sword to Arthur, "whereby to drive the heathen out." The sword Excalibur rose from out of the lake (where the Lady of the Lake dwelt), and Arthur rowed across to it and took it. The hilt of the sword was rich with dazzling jewels, and the blade was so sharp and bright that men were blinded by it. On one side of the blade there were engraved the words, "*Take me*," and on the other side, "*Cast me away*". When Arthur read these inscriptions, he was puzzled, but Merlin advised him to take the sword, because the time to cast it away was yet far off. It was in this way that King Arthur got the sword Excalibur, with which he subsequently, "beat his foemen down."

Which was my pride—of which I was so proud.

Samite—"rich, silk stuff interwoven with gold" **(Fowler)**. *Mystic*—mysterious ; about which nothing was known.

Worn it—used it. *Like a King*—in a manner worthy of a King *i.e.* bravely and honourably.

This also shall be known—the people will also remember my sword, and sing of it also when they sing of me.

Him—the sword. *Mere*—lake.

Middle mere—the middle of the lake.

Lightly—quickly. *Bring me word*—return to tell me what you see.

Lines 39—44. Substance

Sir Bedivere did not like to leave the wounded King alone. But he obeyed his king and went to carry out his wishes.

Meet—proper. *Thus*—alone.

Aidless—helpless. *Smitten*—wounded.

Hest—orders ; wishes. *At full*—fully ; in every detail.

Watch what.....word—repetition of the words of Arthur (line 38).

Lines 45—51. Substance

In obedience to the wishes of his king, Sir Bedivere left the Church, and reached the shore of the lake.

He stept—he came out of the ruined church. *Shrine*—church.

Athwart—across. *The place of tombs*—graveyard.

Mighty bones—dead bodies of the brave heroes of the past.

Lay—were buried.

With flakes of foam—carrying with it bits of foam from the sea.

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Juts—protruding ; projecting forward.

Shining levels of the lake—the lake with its smooth surface shining in moonlight.

Lines 52—65. Substance

Sir Bedivere took out the sword to fling it into the lake. But he was so much tempted by its precious hilt, studded with jewels, that he did not throw it away. Instead, he concealed it in some water-reeds growing on the shore of the lake.

The brand—the sword.

Over him—over his head.

Skirts—edges. *Ran forth*—came out of the cloud.

Sparkled keen with.....hilt—The weather was frosty, and so the moonlight was brighter than usual. The hilt or handle of the sword shone brilliantly in the moonlight.

Haft—hilt ; handle. *Twinkled*—shone brightly like stars.

Diamond sparks—the brilliance of diamonds studded in the hilt.

Myriads—a large number of.

Topaz, jacinth, etc.—diamonds of different colours.

Subtlest jwellery—studded into the hilt with great art and skill.

Dividing the swift...to throw—undecided whether to throw the sword into the lake or not. His mind was thinking swiftly whether to throw the sword or not He was torn with inner conflict.

Many knotted—tangled ; growing densely.

Water flags—reeds and other water-plants growing on the surface of the lake.

Whistled—produced a whistled sound as the wind passed through them.

Stiff—growing straight.

Marge—margin, shore.

So—having concealed the sword instead of throwing it.

Explanation : He gazed so long...about the marge.

On reaching the lake, Sir Bedivere drew out the sword Excalibur. Overhead, the moon came out from behind a cloud, and the bright moonlight fell on the hilt of the sword. The hilt, skilfully wrought as it was with diamonds, sparkled in the clear moonlight.

Sir Bedivere looked at the bright hilt and was so attracted by it that he stood hesitating whether to throw it away or not. At last he thought it better to conceal it among the thick tangled reeds growing on the margin of the lake, which waved and produced a whistling sound, as the wind blew through them.

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Lines 66—81. Substance

When Sir Bedivere returned, King Arthur asked him if he had carried out his orders. From his reply the King could at once judge that he was telling a lie. He had not really thrown the sword into the lake. So he ordered Sir Bedivere to go again and carry out his commands.

Then—when Sir Bedivere returned. *Ripple*—the water-waves. *Lapping on the crag*—dashing against the rocks with a sharp sound.

I heard the ripple.....on the cry—the implication is that he had seen and heard nothing else. So King Arthur at once knew that he was telling a lie.

Betrayed thy nature—you have acted against your own noble nature. *Thy name*—the reputation of truth and honesty which you enjoy.

Rendering—making ; giving.

Beseemed—became ; befitted.

Thy fealty—your loyalty to your king. *Nor like a noble knight*—nor was your answer worthy of a noble knight like you.

Had followed—would have appeared were the sword thrown into the lake. *Motion of the mere*—some movement of the water of the lake.

Charge thee—order you. *Lief*—loyal. *Dear*—dear to me.

Lines 82—109. Substance

Sir Bedivere went to the lake a second time. So fascinating was the hilt of the sword, that he was again tempted by it. He decided to keep it back as a fitting memorial of his great King and his noble achievements.

Ridge—long, narrow, hill-side.

Paced—walked. *Mere*—lake.

Counting the dewy pebbles—small pieces of stone, wet with dew. Sir Bedivere was lost in thought and looked down, as if he were counting the stones lying in his way. *Fixed in thought*—lost in thought.

The wonder—the wonderful beauty of *Curiously*—exquisitely ; artistically.

Chased—engraved. *Strangely*—wonderfully.

He smote his palms together—clapped his hands with wonder and excitement.

Worthy note—remarkable.

What harm undone—what harm would be caused, if the sword were not thrown into the lake.

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Deep harm—a great wrong.

Seeing obedience is the bond of rule—obedience is the tie which unites the people with the King, and makes government and peaceful life possible. *Bond*—tie ; connecting link.

Explanation : What good should.....bond of rule.

These lines portray the inner conflict in the mind of Sir Bedivere. He is torn between his sense of duty and his desire to keep back the sword of King Arthur.

Sir Bedivere was so fascinated by the jewelled hilt of the sword, Excalibur, that he hesitated to throw it into the lake. Its hilt was so beautifully inwrought with gems and precious stones that he thought it would be a pity to lose it. He could not understand why King Arthur had ordered him to throw it into the water, for no good could possibly come out of its being thrown away into the lake. And if he kept it, there would be no harm, except that he would be guilty of disobeying his King. No doubt, disobedience to the sovereign was a grave crime, for obedience was the link that united the subjects with the king and made good and systematic government possible. However, disobedience was excusable under the circumstances.

Against himself—against his own interest.

Record—historical record. *Relic*—memorial.

Should be to aftertime—would be preserved for future times.

Empty breath—fame, unsubstantial and not of much good.

Rumours of a doubt—vague accounts of the life and doings of a person which would be doubted by generations to come ; he would be regarded merely as a mythical personage, having no real existence.

Joust of arms—tournaments : competitions in the use of arms.

Wrought—decorated with precious stones.

The lovely maiden of the Lake—The lady who dwelt in the, lake, and who gave the sword Excalibur to King Arthur :

> *"And near him (Merlin) stood the Lady of the Lake,*
> *Who knows a subtler magic than his own*
> *Clothed in white samite, mystic wonderful.*
> *She gave the King his huge cross hilted sword,*
> *Whereby to drive the heathen out ;"*

Nine years she wrought it—she worked upon the sword for nine years.

Deep—the deep waters of the lake.

Hidden bases of the hills—the bases of the hills hidden in water.

Winning reverence—gaining respect and admiration from his listeners.

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Much honour and.....lost—if the sword were thrown into the lake, much honour and much fame which it would bring to King Arthur would be lost.

Lines 110—132. Substance

Sir Bedivere hid the sword in the water-reeds a second time, and returned to his King. From his reply, King Arthur at once knew that the sword had not been thrown into the lake. He rebuked the Knight sternly and ordered him to try to perform his duty a third time. If he failed again, he would kill him by his own hands.

Clouded—confused; his brain was darkened and he could not distinguish between right and wrong. *Conceit*—views; ideas.

Miserable—wretched. *Unkind*—cruel (because he was not carrying out the wishes of his King). *Untrue*—false; unfaithful.

Unknightly—unworthy of the name of a Knight. *Traitor-hearted*—treacherous.

Woe is me—alas !

Authority forgets a dying King—It is one of those many lines from *Morte D'Arthur* which have become proverbial. A king who is about to die loses his power and authority. He is not obeyed as before.

Forgets—forsakes.

Laid widowed of—deprived of.

The power in his eyes—the look of authority in his eyes.

That bowed the will—which once compelled the people to obey him.

I see thee what thou art—I now understand your real character.

The latest left—the last surviving of.

In whom should.....of all—one who should perform the duties of all the Knights.

Betray me—play false to me; deceive me.

Lust—greed. *Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes*—tempted like a girl, by a glittering object which pleases the eye for some time.

May prosper—may be successful.

Spare—fail.

Explanation : I see what thou art.....with my hands.

King Arthur rebukes Sir Bedivere sternly when he returns a second time without throwing his sword into the lake. He was the sole surviver of the Knights of the Round Table, who had been entirely devoted to King Arthur. Now that they were dead, Sir Bedivere ought alone to do that service to his king which all the

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Knights together used to do in the past. But far from serving his king faithfully, Sir Bedivere had proved false to him. Now he understood his (Sir Bedivere's) real character; he was betraying his sovereign, because he wanted to get possession of the sword, just for the sake of its precious hilt. Either he was excessively greedy or was frivolous like a girl, easily tempted by a glittering object. However, he would give him one more chance. He should go once again and try a third time to throw the sword into the lake. It is just possible that he may succeed this time. But if he again failed to throw it away, he would kill him with his own hands.

Lines 133—147. Substance

The third time Sir Bedivere actually ran to the lake, and without looking at the sword, swung it thrice, and with great force threw it towards the lake. It went flashing like lightning. But before it fell into the lake, a hand rose out of the water and drew it in.

Ran—he ran, because he did not want to be tempted again. "Every word tells of rapid, determined action, refusing to tally with temptation" **(Row & Webb)**.

Lightly— quickly. *Plunged*—entered. *Bulrush-beds*—beds of tall grass and seeds in which he had concealed the sword.

Clutch'd—took out. *Strongly wheel'd*—swung forcefully round his head.

Made lightnings—flashed brightly; sparkled like lightning.

The splendor of the Moon—bright moonlight.

Whirled in an arch—went flying round and round in a semi-circle.

Shot—flew swiftly.

A streamer of the northern morn—like a flash of light such as is seen early in the morning shooting from the horizon in the Arctic regions. The phenomenon is called *Aurora Borealis*. It is caused when floating rocks of ice strike each other with great force.

Moving isles of winter—icebergs; huge rocks of snow. *Shock*—strike against each other; collide.

With—accompanied by. *Noises*—loud, fearful sounds, such as are heard only in the Arctic regions.

Explanation : The great brand.....the brand Excalibur

The sword was sharp and bright, and its hilt was ornamented with jewels and precious stones, and so it flashed and sparkled in the clear moonlight. As Sir Bedivere threw it away, it turned round and round and made a curve before it fell into the water; as it flashed brightly all the way, it traced a line of bright light in the air. So the poet says that the sword in its bright passage through the air looked like

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the flame of light, Aurora Borealis, produced by the collision of the floating masses of ice on the sea in Arctic regions, during dark nights.

Dipt the surface—sank into the water of the lake.

Samite—costly silk cloth.

Mystic—mysterious.

Brandished—moved round.

Lightly—cheerfully. *The other*—Sir Bedivere.

Lines 148—166. Substance

Sir Bedivere returned quickly to King Arthur and told him what he had seen. The King was now satisfied that his wishes had been carried out. He felt that his death was fast approaching. So he asked his Knight and friend to carry him to the shore of the lake.

Drawing thicker breath—breathing more heavily, for he was now on the point of death.

That this is done—that the sword has been thrown into the lake.

Blind my purpose—tempt me once again and thus blind me to my purpose.

So great a miracle as yonder hilt—such a great object of wonder as the hilt of thats word. *Yonder*—that.

Wheeling him—swinging him round my head.

Clothed in white.....in the mere—a repetition of earlier lines. Such repetition is in the manner of epic poets, specially that of Homer.

Make broad thy shoulders—prepare yourselves ; get ready.

The margin—the shores of the lake.

My wound hath taken cold—my wound *i.e.*, my body is growing cold owing to loss of blood. *And I shall die*—I am afraid that my death is near.

Lines 167—175. Substance

Sir Bedivere took the dying King Arthur on his back, and walked with him towards the lake.

Reclining—leaning.

Wistfully—sadly. *As in a picture*—his eyes had a fixed look as is the case with the eyes in a painted portrait.

Remorsefully regarded—looked at him with remorse or repentance. He now repented that he had caused such pain to his dying King by not obeying him in the first instance.

Then took with care—lifted him up carefully.

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Languid—weak hands of the King.

The place of tombs—the graveyard.

Lines 176—192. Substance

As Sir Bedivere walked swiftly to the lake, the King breathed with difficulty. He was afraid that he would die before they reached the lake. But Sir Bedivere walked swiftly over ridges and crags and soon reached the lake.

Panted hard—breathed heavily.

Nightmare, etc.—a fiend or witch, supposed to sit upon the sleeper and suffocate him : when a man dreamt a bad dream, accompanied by a painful sensation in the chest, it was supposed that a witch (called 'nightmare') sat upon his breast and suffocated him.

When all the house is mute—when all others in the home are sleeping peacefully.

And I shall die—I shall die before we reach the lake. So carry me there quickly.

From ridge to ridge—from one hill-side to another.

Clothed with his breath—enveloped in, or surrounded by, the mist caused by his own breathing.

Larger than human—bigger than a man in size. *Frozen hills*—hills covered with snow.

He heard the deep—he heard the roar of the ocean.

A cry before—a cry of lamentation coming from the lake which lay before him.

His own thoughts.....goad—he was urged on to walk quickly by his remorse and by his fear that the King would die before he reached the lake

Harness—armour.

Barren—bare of vegetation.

Chasms—ravines.

Clanged—rang ; echoed back.

Based—placed. *Juts*—projections. *Slippery*—steep. *Crags*—rocks.

Sharp-smitten—stricken forcefully. *The dint of*—the force or weight of.

Armed heels—his shoes shod with steel.

Explanation : Dry clashed his harness.....armed heels.

Sir Bedivere was carrying King Arthur to the lake and was walking fast. He was heavily clad in armour, and as he moved swiftly along the rocks, his armour produced clanging sound, as it struck the

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rocks, and the sound echoed in the frozen caves and hollow ravines. When he placed his armed feet heavily on the projecting pieces of stones, they resounded on either side and filled the place with loud echoes.

The students should note Tennyson's skilful use of alliteration. Throughout the passage, the poet has used words the sound of which echoes the sense.

Lines 193—204. Substance

On reaching the lake, they saw a black ship whose deck was crowded with black-hooded female forms. Among them were three queens. They cried and wailed loudly.

Hove—rose to view. *Dusky*—black.

Scarf—a piece of cloth worn round the neck

From stern to stern—from end to end ; all over.

Descending—coming down nearer to the lake. *They were ware*—they were aware ; they saw.

Were dense—were crowded with. *Stately forms*—majestic figures.

Black stoled—wearing loose, black cloaks. *Black hooded*—wearing black head dresses. They were all wearing black cloaks because black is a symbol of mourning. They were mourning the death of Arthur. The ship was also black for this reason.

Like a dream—unreal, vague and unsubstantial like figures seen in a dream.

By these—near those hooded figures.

That shivered to the tingling stars—the cry reached quivering to the twinkling stars. The expression has been objected to on the ground that it has a touch of exaggeration. **Mr. Brimley** finely answers the objection : "The cry comes from a company of spirits amid mountains, where the natural power of echo is heightened by the silence of night, the clearness of winter air and the hardening effects of frost. Such a cry at such a time, and in such a place, would thrill from rock to rock, from summit to summit, till it seemed to pierce the sky, and die away in infinitely distant pulsations among the stars."

An agony of lamentation—a cry of intense anguish.

Shrills—blows with a sharp, shrill sound.

Since the making of the world—since creation.

Lines 205—226. Substance.

King Arthur was taken on the barge. The tallest of the three Queens placed his head on her lap, and wept bitterly to see the King, who was now a mere wreck of his former self.

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That rose the tallest of them all—who was the tallest of the three. (Her name was Morgan Le Fay. The three Queens symbolise, Hope, Faith, and Charity).

Loosed—loosened; untied. *Casque*—helmet; head-dress.

Chafed—rubbed (to make them wrose).

Complaining loud—lamenting loudly.

Striped with dark blood—covered with blood which had dried up and turned black.

Wither'd—faded; pale. *Smote*—striken, touched. *The springing east*—the early morning sun rising in the east.

Like the wither'd .....springing east—like the Moon when its light is fading before the early beams of the rising sun.

Greaves—armour for the leg below the knees. *Cuisses*—amour for the thigh.

Dash'd with drops of onset—marked with blood, shed during the battle.

Light and lutrous curls—locks of hair light in colour, and bright and shining.

That made his forehead.....the dias-throne—the golden locks of Arthur are being compared to the golden rays of the sun, and his forehead to the disc of the rising sun.

High from his dias-throne—as he sat on his throne raised high on a dias or platform.

Were parch'd with dust—were covered with dust and looked dry.

Clotted into points—clots of blood had joined together the hair of King Arthur.

The knightly growth.....his lips—*i.e.* his moustaches.

Shatter'd column—a broken pillar.

With lance in rest—with his spear in his hand ready for use.

From spur to plume—from head to foot. *A star of tournament*—the most brilliant of all the contestants in a tournament.

The lists—the arena; the enclosure in which tournaments were held. *Camelot*—the capital of King Arthur. *Shot thro' the lists*—like a meteor or shooting star shooting across the sky.

Charged—attacked his opponent.

Explanation : For all his face was.....of ladies and of kings.

The three queens stretched forth their hands and helped Arthur to come up to the barge. They now began to weep and the tallest and the fairest of them placed his head upon her lap, and unfastening

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his armour, rubbed his hands, called him lovingly by his name and wept. Her tears fell upon his forehead, which was marked with blood of the battle.

His face was pale and white, and looked like the pale moon, when its light fades away at the first rays of the morning sun. His armour was marked with drops of blood, coming out of his wounds; and his fair and shining locks of hair—which, when he was placed on the raised throne, gave his forehead the apprearance of the disc of the rising sun—were now covered with dust, or were matted by frozen blood and were hanging loosely, so as to reach down to his moustaches. Thus King Arthur, bereft of all his former strength and splendour, looked like a mighty pillar lying on the ground, broken and shattered. He was now reduced to a shadow of his former self. He no longer looked like that Arthur, who had once in tournaments, passed swiftly from one side to another, like a shooting star, charging his opponents with his lance in the presence of the assembled lords and ladies.

Lines 227—239. Substance

Sir Bedivere lamented that the old, glorious times were now no more. All the other knights of the Round Table were dead, and he was left alone in the world. He would now have to live among strangers.

My forehead and my eyes—My face.

The light—the star in the East which appeared in the sky at Christ's birth.

The holy Elders—the wise men of the east, called the Magi.

The light that led the holy Elders—the star moved in the sky and stopped over the house were Christ was born. In this way it guided the Magi to baby Christ.

Myrrh—a kind of incense.

Dissolved—broken as all the knights are dead.

Which was an image of the mighty world—it was round like the round earth.

Days darken round me—My life is now sad and cheerless.

And the years—I will now have to pass my life in the company of. *Other minds*—Unsympathetic people.

Line 240—265. Substance

King Arthur advised Sir Bedivere not to grieve for change is the law of nature and old order always changes giving place to the new. Therefore, instead of mourning and lamenting he should rather pray for his soul, for much can be achieved through prayer. As for

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himself, he would now go the valley of Avilion where (according to the prophecy of Merlin) his wound would be healed.

Fulfils himself—accomplishes his purpose.

Explanation : The old order.....corrupt the world.

These are the most frequently quoted lines in *Morte D'Arthur*. They have become proverbial. Old customs and institutions always change, and their place is taken by new ones ; and it is good that this should happen, for, however good an institution may be, it stagnates in course of time, and people, losing sight of the old ideal, clinging to the mere empty form, get degenerated. Hence God in His infinite wisdom changes the order of things, and fulfils his designs in a variety of ways, that we human beings cannot understand. Hence, if the institution of chivalry and knighthood dies away, there is no reason for regret, because change is the law of nature.

What comfort is in me ?—I can do nothing to comfort you.

May He within Himself make pure—"may God accept my work and, absorbing it, as it were, into Himself, purify it of all its unworthy elements" (**Row and Webb**).

Wrought—achieved ; accomplished.

Wherefore—therefore.

What are men.....goats—sheep are no better than animals.

That nourish a blind life within the brain—who live an entirely material life, like animals, and have no spiritual sense.

Explanation. For what are men.....call them friend.

King Arthur asks Sir Bedivere to pray to God both for himself and his friends, and this will bring comfort to him in his misery and loneliness. Prayer achieves miracles in this world, for it is in prayer that the God in man meets the man in God. Man is blessed with spirit and he knows that God exists ; still if he does not pray to God both for himself and his friends and lives a purely material life, he is no better than brutes, who are entirely devoid of spiritual sense.

Bound by gold chains about the feet of God—The ancients believed that the earth was bound to the heaven by a golden chain. Tennyson says here that the earth is not bound only at one place by a chain of gold, but it is bound to heaven every where by the chain of prayer, rising from the soul of man to God. 'Prayer' is said to be the gold chain that links the earth to Heaven. *When prayer rises from the depth of the soul to God, the God in man meets the man in God.*

If indeed I go—If I live long enough to reach there.

For all my mind is clouded with a doubt—I am doubtful if the prophecy of Merlin would be fulfilled. The prophecy was that Arthur would live and return again.

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Island valley of Avilion—a mythical valley supposed to be the resting place of blessed souls.

Deep meadowed happy—with rich fertile meadows. *Fair with*—decorated with.

Orchard lawns—grassy plots with fruit trees.

Bowery hollows—hollow places shaded with trees. *Crowned with*—ringed round with.

Grievous—serious.

Lines 266—273. Substance

Arthur's barge sailed away and Bedivere was left standing all alone on the shores of the lake.

Brink—shore

Fluting—singing. *Carol*—song. *Ruffles*—uufolds ; spreads out. *Pure cold plume*—white feathers. *Takes the water*—swims on the water.

Swarthy—dark. *Webs*—webbed feet.

The barge with.....with swarthy webbs. The boat started and moved away from the shore with the help of oar and sails. While it was thus sailing away, with its passengers lamenting and crying, it looked like a swan, who spreads out her pure white feathers and moves along the water with the help of her webbed feet, singing the last piteous song, just before her death. Here the white sail of the boat is compared to the plumes of the bird, and the cry of lamentation rising from the boat to the last song of the swan before her death.

Revolving many memories—thinking over many past things.

The verge of dawn—the eastern horizon.

———

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20

Crossing The Bar

(*a*) THE POEM

SUNSET and evening star,
And one clear call for me !
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea.

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar.

(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION— CRITICAL SUMMARY

Its Composition and Significance

Crossing the Bar was composed by Lord Tennyson at the age of 81. There is an interesting story concerning this poem. When he was crossing the Solent, (name of a river) on his way to Farringford from Aldworth, his grand-daughter Helen was with him. Just in the middle of his voyage, he shouted to Helen, "*Helen ! I am crossing the*

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bar ! I am crossing the bar." And then he burst into wild laughter. Crossing the bar of a harbour, clearing it, is a difficult operation and requires the expert guidance of a pilot. The poet adopts this metaphor to convey the ideas of his passage from this life (the harbour) to the next life (the open sea). Tennyson regarded this poem as his final testament to the world and it was printed by all newspapers, the day he died. Regarding the composition of this poem Tennyson's son writes : "*Crossing the Bar*" was written in my father's eighty-first year on a day in October when we came from Aldworth to Farringford. Before reaching Farringford he heard the moaning of the Bar in his mind, and after dinner he showed me this poem written out. I said, "that is the crown of your life's work." He answered, "It came in a moment." He explained the "Pilot" as that Divine and unseen who is always guiding us. A few days before my father's death he said to me, "Mind you put 'Crossing the Bar' at the end of all editions of my poems." This was done accordingly.

Its Allegorical Significance

The poem is an allegory. An allegory is a literary composition with a double meaning. It has a hidden moral significance. Thus apparently the poem tells of an ordinary event. It is on the surface a description of a voyage of the poet from Aldworth to Farrington, but really it is a description of the soul's journey to the unknown land of death. The poet tells of his departure from this world to the Eternal Home which is the kingdom of Heaven. The call (death) comes to him at sunset (in the evening of life) and he leaves his worldly home with a calm and serene mind. His mind is in perfect peace (calm sea) when he undertakes the voyage (dies) and sails to his destination (kingdom of heaven.) No sad farewell should be given to him, because he will be carried beyond Time and Place, to the other world, where he will meet God. His journey does not frighten him because he will meet the Pilot (divine guide) at the end of his voyage.

Thus in the poem, "sunset and evening star", symbolise old age, 'the call' is the call of death, and, 'moaning of the bar' symbolises the fear and agony of death. The journey of the soul from this world to the other world is represented through the metaphor of the voyage of a ship across the ocean. This world of ours is the harbour, and the 'other world', Infinite and Enternal, is the real home of the soul, where it is united once again with the Divine, the 'Pilot,' the guide of the human soul.

Its Philosophy

The poem is an expression of Tennyson's faith in God and the immortality of the human soul. Death is merely the end of the body. The soul does not die. It is immortal, Death is merely the journey of the soul from this world to the other. The poet is not afraid of death, he feels no agitation at its approach

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because he is sure that his soul would live on, and would ultimately become one with the Divine, its guide and mentor. In short, the poem embodies, "very briefly, and in perfect lyrical form, the essence of his religious creed—a profound faith in God, blended with a firm belief that God's providence works by law, though the meaning of it may be hidden" (**Hadow**).

Its Popularity

This fine lyric, intense and moving, has found its way in most anthologies. It is the swan-song of Tennyson and is fittingly placed at the end of his works, for it is the, "roof and crown", of his creation.

(c) CRITICAL NOTES, COMMENTS, EXPLANATIONS, ETC.

Stanza 1. Substance

The poet is old and he hears the clear call of death. His only wish is that there should be no moaning and crying when he dies.

Sunset and evening Star—sunset and evening star symbolise old age, the evening or close of life.

One clear call—the call of death which the poet hears clearly in his old age. He knows that his death is approaching. He actually died three years after the poem was written.

Moaning—weeping and crying. *The bar*—the harbour with sand deposits round it. *And may there be.....the bar*—the poet wishes that the weather should be calm and quiet so that no moaning and wailing of the sea-waves is heard. He wants to die calmly and quietly with no mourning on the part of his friends. "Life is compared to a harbour, with its narrow space of familiar waters, and the life after death to the vast expanse of ocean outside."

When I put out to sea—when the poet dies, and his soul sails for the other world. The journey of the soul from this world to the other world is here compared to the sailing out of a ship.

Stanza 2. Substance

The poet wishes that when he puts out to sea, the weather should be perfectly calm and quiet. The sea should be calm and gentle, as motionless as a sleeping person. In other words, the poet wants to die calmly without the usual agony and pain of death.

But such a tide as moving seems sleep—the waves should move as gently, they should be as calm and quiet, as a sleeping person. The poet wishes to die calmly without suffering the usual pain and agony of death.

Sound and foam—disturbance and agitation *i.e.*, the pain and fear of death. *Too full...foam*—if the sea is deep and full, it is easy

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for the ship to cross the bar *i.e.* the expanse of sand round the harbour. Then there is no risk and danger to the ship. The poet also wishes for a smooth journey from this world to the next.

Boundless deep—the limitless ocean, the ocean of Eternity.

That—the ship *i.e.* the human soul. *Turns again*—sails once again. *Home*—the other world, which is the real home of the soul, from where it comes to this world for a short stay, and to where it returns after death.

The soul is here being compared to a ship, the ocean to the Ocean of Eternity which separates this life from life in the other world.

Stanza 3. Substance

The poet is already old. It is the evening of his life, and the darkness of death would fall upon him. He wishes that when he dies and his soul sets sail for the other world, there should be no mourning, wailing and crying.

Twilight and evening bell—they indicate that it is evening and the activity of the day must end. They symbolise old age, the close of life.

The dark—just as after evening comes the darkness of night, so old age is followed by the darkness of death.

And may there be.....farewell—his friends should bid him a cheerful farewell. There should be no expression of grief at the time of his death.

Embark—set sail *i.e.* die.

Stanza 4. Substance

The poet is not afraid of death. Rather, he welcomes it. For it is only after death that he would meet his God in the other world, who is the guide of the human soul.

Bourne—boundary. *Bourne of Time and Place*—this world limited by time and place, as contrasted with the other world which is infinite.

The flood—the sea ; the ocean of Eternity. *The flood may bear me far*—after death, the poet's soul will sail across the ocean of Eternity till it reaches the other world, its real home.

Pilot—God who, in the words of Tennyson, "is that divine and unseen who is always guiding us". God who guides the human soul as a pilot guides the ship.

When I have crossed the bar—After crossing the Ocean of Eternity, the human soul reaches the divine, the friend and guide of the human soul. Hence it is that the poet is not afraid of death. Rather, he welcomes it.

———

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21

Break, Break, Break

(*a*) THE POEM

BREAK, break, break,
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.

O, well for the fisherman's boy,
That he shouts with his sister at play!
O, well for the sailor lad,
That he sings in his boat on the bay!

And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But O, for the touch of a vanish'd hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still !

Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O Sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.

(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION—CRITICAL SUMMARY

The Occasion and the Setting

Break, Break, Break is one of the finest lyrics of Tennyson, one which has found its way in most anthalogies of Victorian poetry. First published in the *Poems, 1842*, it was inspired by the death of the poet's friend, Arthur Hallam, in 1833. The scene of the poem is Clevedon Church, situated on a lonely hill, overlooking the Bristol Channel. In this church is buried, Arthur Hallam. However, this elegaic lyric was actually composed by the poet walking at night in the lanes near Somersby, though in the poem he imagines himself sitting on the grave of his friend and surveying the scene around.

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Substance of the Poem

The waves of the sea are rising and falling. As if sharing the grief of the poet, they strike their head against the rocky shore and break into water drops. The waves of the sea, like the poet himself, remain helpless in conveying their grief to the shore. The poet observes that 'human life goes on as usual. The stately ship come into the harbour and go out of it as usual, and the children are shouting joyfully at their game. However, neither the sympathy of nature, nor the throb and zest of life around him, can serve to lessen his grief. His sorrow is too deep for words. His friend is dead, and he will never again hear his voice, nor touch his hand. The pleasure which he enjoyed in his company will never be his again :

But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.

The Grief : Poignant and Intense

This short elegy, more than *In Memoriam*, is the true record of the emotions of the poet during the dark winter months that followed the death of Hallam. It is an outpouring of his poignant and intense grief ; it comes direct from the heart of the poet, and so goes direct to the heart of the readers. It must rank for ever among the most poignant elegaic lyrics in the English language. "*Simple but elegant, intensely subjective yet disciplined, it strikes Tennyson's most personal and poignant note.*" That is why, the lyric has been praised by one critic after another. Praising it, writes **John Pettigrew** ; " 'A deep distress hath humanized my soul', wrote Wordsworth in the *Elegiac Stanzas* prompted by the sudden death of his brother. Deep distress humanizes Tennyson's too, giving, obviously and immediately, the validity of intense personal experience to the eternal note of sadness that had earlier often been artificial, vapid, sentimental : there is nothing 'painted' in, *Break, break, Break*, supremely felt, simple, and disciplined, which will forever stand among the world's great laments. Hallam's death not only nourishes Tennyson's elegiac gifts; it also sharpens the opposing forces within the divided sensibility, his grief simultaneously encouraging retreat into solitary brooding, and demanding a need to advance."

Artistic Merits

Morton Luce is all praises for Tennyson's art in the poem. In his view the mere sound of the poem, and the poignancy of its anguish, have such power to take captive our ear and heart, that we sometimes miss the beauty half-concealed within it. Few of Tennyson's productions are so spontaneous as this; yet it is more than a mere cry of despair; for in none does nature so eloquently express what words and even melody can only conceal. Five times the poet abandons the disguise of speech, and paints his sorrow in a vivid picture. Before us lies the sea, powerless to tell its sobbing trouble
11 to the shore, as wave after wave of utterance dies broken on the cold

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grey stones. On the shore the children are playing; what could they know of death? Out on the bay the sailor boy is singing in the happy activity of life; in the distance are ships returning from a prosperous voyage, and sailing on majestically to the neighbouring port—four pictures in one. *"And in these the poet expresses more eloquently than in any words the sense of desolation made yet more desolate by contrast with joys it cannot share.* In *In Memoriam* the corresponding emotion may be discovered in one heart-broken line,

"The noise of life begins again".

The fifth picture is of the sea breaking hopelessly at the foot of the crags that seem to spurn it from its desire; so death stands inexorable between him and all that he loved.

(c) CRITICAL NOTES, COMMENTS, EXPLANATIONS, ETC.

Stanza I. Substance

The poet sits on the grave of his friend Arthur Hallam on a lonely hill, overlooking the Bristol Channel. The poet is sad at the death of his friend. His sorrow is so deep that he fails to find adequate words to express it.

Break, break.....O Sea—the waves of the sea are rising and falling, and breaking into weter drops. It seems to the poet that they are striking their head against the sea-shore, as if in sympathy with his grief. Like him they, too, fail to express their grief.

Would—wish. *The thoughts*—*i.e.* his grief at the death of Hallam, his dearest friend who died suddenly in 1833.

Stanza 2. Substance

The sailor's lad, and the fisherman's boy are happy at play. They are shouting with joy. The poet alone is sad.

O well for, etc.—life is happy and pleasant for the fisherman's boy, but not for the poet.

Stanza 3. Substance

The ships are coming and going as usual But the poet's friend is dead. He can no longer hear his voice or feel the touch of his hand. Life will never again be the same for him.

Stately—majestic. *Haven*—harbour. *But O for, etc.*—the poet wishes that his friend were alive and he could hear his voice and touch his hand.

Vanish'd hand—the hand of his dead friend.

That is still—that death has silenced for ever.

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Stanza 4. Substance

Nature may mourn the death of his friend in sympathy with him, but alas ! his friend will never live again. He will never again know that happiness which he enjoyed in his company.

Crags—rocks; rocky shore.

The tender grace—happiness ; pleasure. *Of a day that is dead*—of the time when his friend lived and he enjoyed his company. That time will never return.

Will never come back to me—the poet will never again know that happiness.

———

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22

The Eagle

(*a*) THE POEM

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

The Eagle—first publised in 1851—is a mere fragment of a poem, six lines in all. The poem is remarkable for its minuteness of observation and preciseness of delineation. Lines like, "*The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls*" are sheer inspiration of genius. The aptness of the epithet, '*wrinkled*', and that of, '*thunderbolt*', for the steep coming down of the eagle, are fully brought out by **S. A. Brooke's** comment on the poem. He writes, "I used to think that the phrase '*wrinkled sea*' in the fragment called *The Eagle* was too bold. But one day I stood on the edge of the cliff below Slieve League in Donegal. The cliff from which I looked down on the Atlantic was nine hundred feet in height. Beside me the giant slope of Slieve League plunged down from its summit for more than eighteen hundred feet. As I gazed on the sea below, which was calm in the shelter, for the wind blew off the land, the varying puffs that eddied in and out among the hollows and juttings of the cliffs, covered the quiet surface with an infinite network of involved ripples. It was exactly Tennyson's *wrinkled sea*. Then by huge good fortune an eagle, which built on one of the ledges of Slieve League, flew out of his eyrie and poised, barking, on his wings; but in a moment fell precipitate, as their

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manner is, straight down a thousand feet into the sea; and I could not help crying out :

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

(c) CRITICAL NOTES, COMMENTS, ETC.

Close to the sun.....lands—the eagle sits on a high mountain peak. So his world is lonely, and he is nearer to the sun than man below.

Ringed—encircled with. *The azure world*—the blue sky.

———

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23

From "Maud, a Monodrama"

A Monodrama

[*Maud* was originally entitled, "*Maud, and the Madness*", and in this way the fact was emphasised that it was Tennyson's study in madness, morbidity and neurosis, and competent scholars have claimed that it is a successful study. Later on, the title was changed to *Maud, a Monodrama*, and this gives a better indication of the real nature of the poem. It is a monodrama, a new kind of composition half way between the dramatic monologue and the drama proper. It is a psychological study of great power, in which the central figure, the neurotic, almost mad, lover of Maud indulges in long soliloquies and thus reveals his soul.

Psychological Study of a Neurotic

Maud was first published in 1855, shortly after the outbreak of the Crimean War. By this time the poet was happily married, was the poet-laureate, and was at the zenith of his prosperity, fame and recognition. "It would, therefore, be expected that the poem would be cheerful in tone and sunny in atmosphere. But quite to the contrary, it is a melodramatic story of suicide, murder, and madness, dished up for popular applause with vehement invective on the vices of the English nation, and claptrap appeals to the war feeling of the day." Tennyson is not speaking in his own person, but under the guise of the character that he is portraying, which is that of a man of keen and delicate sensibilities given to morbid introspection and self-analysis, with his earliest views of life darkened and distorted by a grievous personal calamity. Then comes a great love, and the man is taken out of himself, and from being bitter and contemptuous he becomes genial and hopeful. His thought-centre is shifted from himself to Maud, and the result is a moral change. A great happiness heals his wounded spirit and nature and man appear to him in a new light. Nay, when this short-lived happiness is dashed to the ground and succeeded by despair and madness, the old state of things does not return. Roused and strengthened by the love that saved him at the

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first, he retains his hold upon a healthy life and sympathy with his kind, in the healing calm that comes from a patriotic unity with his countrymen in a great and unselfish purpose. The poem is, "a protest against the worldliness overriding love in men and nations, and a complaint of the misery and degradation resulting therefrom." The Greek tragic element is present in *Maud*. The love that is so sweet to the hero, though it is his moral salvation, leads him on to murder and madness. The sense of an overmastering Destiny, of an ancestral curse, "the household Fury sprinkled with blood," broods over the action and events of the poem, and its personages seem to be driven as victims to their fate.

The Story

Maud narrates a love-story of a neurotic in a series of sweet lyrics, each one of great power and beauty, but only loosely connected together. The story begins with the narrator lamenting the mysterious death, perhaps by suicide, of his father, and his family's ruin brought about by the schemes of the old lord of the Hall with whose daughter he falls in love. He wins Maud's love and there is a splendid lyric out-burst expressing his joy. Maud has accepted him as her lover, and he feels a new man. For him, there is none like her in the world. However, when, Maud's brother, who had gone to London for some time, returns, the lover's joy is marred. Earlier, the lover had spoken to Maud about her brother's hatred for him, but Maud had assured him that though her brother was rough he was yet kind, and that she would obtain his consent.

When Maud speaks to her brother of her love, they have a quarrel because he wants her to love a certain lord of the Hall and marry him. There is to be a dinner and a dance at the Hall that night. Maud's lover is not invited. But Maud has agreed to meet her lover in her rose garden after the dancing, and he is to see her in her ball dress and jewels. Here comes that lovely lyric (*Come into the garden, Maud*) in which he invites Maud to the garden where he awaits her among the flowers. At length he hears her coming.

Maud's meeting with her lover is interrupted by the sudden appearance of her brother on the scene. Hot words between Maud's brother and her lover follow. There is a duel in which her brother is killed. Her lover runs away for fear of arrest. The news reaches him that Maud has died of grief at the double tragedy (the death of her brother and the running away of her lover). He is now in a state of complete despair, which is vividly brought out. Later, he returns to England where he lapses into madness. At last the fit of madness is over. By this time the Crimean War has broken out and he finds comfort in the service of his country by joining the army.

Some Shortcomings

On its first appearance *Maud* was vehemently criticised. It

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was a new kind of poem, most readers failed to understand it, and so denounced it as obscure and incoherent. It was condemned for its glorification and advocacy of war. The views of the mad lover of Maud were taken to be views of Tennyson himself and it was called a, '*war-whoop*', and Tennyson an, "*armchair war-monger*" It was criticised for its looseness of construction. **Hugh Walker** beautifully summarises the various faults of the poem thus : "Of all his longer works, except *The Princess*, this lyrical monodrama is the least satisfactory. Nowhere do we find more splendid fragments of poetry : but *Maud* too is loosely compacted. The thread of connexion is the character of the hero whose mind, in an unwholesome state from the start, is followed through passion, exaltation and disaster to madness. In respect of the general scheme, therefore, there is some resemblance to *In Memoriam*. Both poems are studies of a soul. But in *In-Memoriam* the soul is the poet's own and the method is the method of reflection, while in *Maud* the method is dramatic. Tennyson had already made tentative advances towards the dramatic method, for *The May Queen* and *Locksley Hall* are dramic lyrics. These poems had attained a popularity somewhat beyond their deserts ; they were perhaps the best known of all their author's writings ; but they were by no means the finest poetry he had produced. *The May Queen* borders upon the namby pamby, and the hero of *Locksley Hall* is unworthy of the splendid verse. The same mistake is repeated in *Maud*. The picture of reason over thrown may be made impressive, but there ought to be a grandeur in the reason before its overthrow. There is no grandeur in the peevish, querrulous, scolding hero of *Maud* ; and, therefore, even if the scenes of madness had been skilfully managed, they would have failed to produce their proper effect."

The attempt of the poet to build up the fragments—the separate lyrics—into a whole is significant, and so are the contents of many of the parts. The poet, though a lyrist, will not rest in the emotion of the moment. The purpose, the didactic element, traceable, sometimes to its detriment, in nearly all his work after the death of Hallam, is prominent here. Science has left its mark, and the evolutionary tendencies of the poet are unmistakable. The age has also left its mark and the poet is awake to the evils which stirred the spirits of Carlyl and Kingsley and Mill. The "Mammonite mother" killing, "her babe for a burial fee", the poor, "hovell'd and hustled together, each sex, like swine," the society in which, "only the ledger lives, and only not all men lie,"—we hear of similar things to these long afterwards in some of Tennyson's most powerful poems. He was still only learning how to use such material. The poet's defence of war has been loudly condemned ; but it is to be remembered that it is a defence of war conceived as bringing to an end not the peace of the golden age, but peace based on lies and fraud and oppression, and substituting for the self-seeking of the trading trickster that which, at any rate, unites the nation in a common pursuit of a single end, not meanly selfish.

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The Poem : Its Variety

Thus Tennyson's *Maud* is a poem of many facets. It is a successful and consistent study in the psychology of a neurotic, and taking into consideration his advocacy of war as a panecea for all social ills, one critic calls *Maud* a study, *"in madness both individual and national, from first to last"*. It is also, *"a crucial social document"*, a record of mammon worship, and war-hysteria of the age, during the days of the Crimean War, and as **J B. Steane** tells us, *"Regeneration, national and moral, is an important theme"*, of the poem. As recent scholars like **R. W. Rader** have shown, it is also an autobiographical record of great significance. There are close connections between the poem and the events in Tennyson's life. It is a great love-tale because it reflects Tennyson's own love-story.

The Autobiographical Note

Maud, the heroine of the poem, **Mr. Rader** believes, is, 'an image in which were blended Tennyson's memories of all three of the women he had successively loved.' This is probably the most important aspect of the poem, for if the theory is correct, it adds another chapter to Tennyson's biography. In about 1825, Tennyson met Rosa Baring, the daughter of a wealthy neighbour living at Harrington Hall, some two miles from Somersby Rectory. The relationship probably continued till 1836. Rosa Baring, apparently, always believed that the, 'rose of the rosebud garden of girls', in *Maud*, had reference to her. In 1837 it was rumoured that she was to be engaged to another man. Tennyson left Somersby in November, probably jealous and wounded in spirit, and it was probably about this time that he wrote *Locksley Hall*. "Now *Locksley Hall*, in which an embittered lover is again the narrator, has close kinship with Maud, and the conclusion one draws is that both poems embody a good deal of the author's own anger and frustration arising during the, 'thirties and continuing to poison his life through the next decade as well".

Of the two other women who may be represented by the character of Maud, one was Emily Sellwood, who after a frustratingly long and broken engagement became Tennyson's wife. The other was Sophy Rawnsley, the girl who is believed to be the original of the early poem *Airy, Fairy Lilian*. The two women, **Mr. Rader** suggests, stood in Tennyson's mind for two distinct types of womanhood, and the rose and the lily were their respective symbols in his poetry. In **Mr. Rader's** view, there is an autobiographical reference when Maud, who has been associated with rose and lily at various points in the poem, is described as, 'Queen lily and rose in one.' Her nature has the beauties of both girls, and the deficiencies of neither. She is in fact virtually 'true womanhood' as Tennyson found

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it in Emily Sellwood. 'The peace of God came into my life before the altar when I married her', said Tennyson years later. The lover of Maud was never so fortunate : he did not come to the altar and if he found the peace of God at all it was through warfare. But in creating him, Tennyson has re-lived much of his own life : his family troubles, his loves and private sufferings. As in *In Memoriam* he expressed all the disturbance, emotional and intellectual, which Hallam's death brought with it, so in *Maud* Tennyson expressed the joys and sorrows he had known through love. Both, then, are very personal poems, and it begins to look as though Maud is after all the more personal of the two. "*Biographically*", says **Mr. Rader,** '*Maud*' *is a crucial document.*" He calls it "*a recapitulation of the inner and outer circumstances of his tortured early life, a deeply rooted act of spiritual self-definition and affirmaiion by which, after the commitment initiated by marriage and the Laureateship, he moved from this earlier to his later career; it is the swan song of the bitter and troubled young poet, the inaugural hymn of the Laureate.*"

The Real Greatness of the Poem : Its Lyrics

The greatest glory of *Maud*, however, lies in its individual lyrics. *Maud* may not be a great poem, but it contains great poetry. It contains some of the finest and the most poignant of the lyrics ever penned by Tennyson and they are hard to excel in the whole range of English poetry. That is why **Jowett** praising the poem writes, "No poem since Shakespeare seems to show equal power of the same kind, or equal knowledge of human nature. No modern poem contains more lines that ring in the ears of men. I do not know any verse out of Shakespeare in which the ecstasy of love soars to such a height." "The story of *Maud* unfolds itself in a spring of lyrics, each of them being a more or less independent poem, and each introducing a new moment in the situation with its special mood, which is embodied in the metre. Some considerable mental agility is needed to fall in with the rapid changes of mood and motive which succeed each other within the compass of a piece that is too short for the delineation of character : ranging from melodramatic horror in the opening stanzas to passionate and joyous melodies in the middle part, sinking into a dolorous wail, rising into frenzy, and closing with the trumpet note of war." The return of the metre re-announces the mood. Slow sane iambs, hectic anapaests, joyous trochees, and many birdlike or dirgelike short measures, form, in their succession and interwoven recurrence, a complete musical fabric, one extreme being seen in, "go not, happy day," and in the famous song of the rooks calling, the other in the long-breathed appeal, climbing and falling through a sentence of fourteen plangent lines, to the, "Cold and clear—cut face." A full study of the prosody of *Maud* considered as an index of emotion, might be the quickest way to the heart of the poem.

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Conclusion

The poetic genius of Tennyson was essentially lyrical in quality and it was marred only by the fact that he was unable, except in isolated moments, to dissociate his lyrical energy from other energies—dramatic, narrative, ethical, theological and didactic. The primary force of Tennyson's poetry is his central lyrical energy, an energy which is, unfortunately, often obscured in this poem as in other poems—by other and less vital elements]

(*a*) THE POEM

(XVIII)

I

I have led her home, my love, my only friend.
There is none like her, none.
And never yet so warmly ran my blood
And sweetly, on and on
Calming itself to the long-wish'd-for end,
Full to the banks, close on the promised good.

II

None like her, none.
Just now the dry-tongued laurels' pattering talk
Seem'd her light foot along the garden walk,
And shook my heart to think she comes once more.
But even then I heard her close the door;
The gates of heaven are closed, and she is gone.

III

There is none like her, none,
Nor will be when our summers have deceased.
O, art thou sighing for Lebanon
In the long breeze that streams to thy delicious East,
Sighing for Lebanon,
Dark cedar, tho' thy limbs have here increased,
Upon a pastoral slope as fair,
And looking to the South and fed
With honey'd rain and delicate air,
And haunted by the starry head
Of her whose gentle will has changed my fate,
And made my life a perfumed altar-flame;
And over whom thy darkness must have spread
With such delight as theirs of old, thy great
Forefathers of the thornless garden, there
Shadowing the snow limb'd Eve from whom she came?

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(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

It is one of the many fine lyrics in *Maud, a Monodrama* which is essentially a collection of sweet lyrics. The lover has proposed to Maud, and she has agreed to marry him. The present lyric contains his sudden outburst of joy at his acceptance. He feels an entirely new man. To him *Maud* is the most beautiful of all God's creatures, loved alike by man and nature. There is none like her and the lover has never felt so exultant, and the blood has never run so warmly in his veins.

The various sights and sounds of nature remind him of his beloved. For example, the sound of a laurel leaf pattering to the ground puts him in mind of the gentle sound in Maud's steps. He imagines that even the cedar tree in the garden must delight to give her shade, to her who is for him the sole woman in the world, just as the cedars of Eden shadowed the sole woman—Eve her ancestress. With the acceptance of Maud, the very face of Nature is changed for him. Nature seems more beautiful to him now. The stars, once cold and pitiless, now twinkle as if at play, thanks to Maud's love, for whose sake he would die, though life now is sweet. For what has Death to do with Love? Only this—that Death's presence makes love the dearer. But it is midnight and Maud sleeps, and he must go for a while. He bids farewell to her, while the stars twinkle on in happy unison with his great happiness. As he hears Maud closing her door, he feels, "The doors of heaven are closed," on him.

(*c*) CRITICAL NOTES, COMMENTS, ETC.

Calming itself...end—Maud has accepted the lover, and the lover tries to calm his agitation and wait patiently for their marriage which he longs for.

Full to the banks—overflowing with happiness. *Close on the promised good*—Quite near to the attainment of his goal, *i.e.* marriage with Maud.

Pattering talk—the pattering sound produced by the falling of laurel leaves.

The gates of heaven are closed—all happiness comes to an end for the lover, at least for the time being. Paradise is shut out for the lover, as Maud closes her doors.

Our summers have deceased—when summer is no more. *Lebanon*—a country of the warm south, where there is summer when winter overtakes England.

Tho' thy...increased—though the Cedar has grown up there where Maud lives. *Dark*—shady.

Whose gentle will...fate—Maud whose acceptance of his love has made him extremely happy.

Perfumed altar-flame—sweet and fragrant like incense burning in a temple.

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Darkness—shade.

Thy great forefathers...garden—the great Cedar trees growing in the garden of Eden, planted by the Almighty Himself for the first man and woman—Adam and Eve. *From whom she came*—Eve, the first woman and the ancestress of Maud, as of all womankind.

Shadowing—shading. *The snow-limb'd*—with fair skin, white like snow.

Shadowing...came—just as the Cedar now shades Maud so also the Cedar trees that grew in Eden shaded Eve, the ancestress of Maud.

"COME INTO THE GARDEN, MAUD"

(*a*) THE POEM

XXII

I

Come into the garden, Maud,
For the black bat, night, has flown,
Come into the garden, Maud,
I am here at the gate alone;
And the woodbine spices are wafted abroad,
And the musk of the rose is blown.

II

For a breeze of morning moves,
And the planet of Love is on high,
Beginning to faint in the light that she loves
On a bed of daffodil sky,
To faint in the light of the sun she loves,
To faint in his light, and to die.

III

All night have the roses heard
The flute, violin, bassoon;
All night has the casement jessamine stirr'd
To the dancers dancing in tune;
Till a silence fell with the waking bird,
And a hush with the setting moon.

IV

I said to the lily, "There is but one,
With whom she has heart to be gay.
When will the dancers leave her alone?
She is weary of dance and play."

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Now half to the setting moon are gone,
And half to the rising day;
Low on the sand and loud on the stone
The last wheel echoes away.

V

I said to the rose, "The brief night goes
In babble and revel and wine.
O young lord-lover, what sighs are those,
For one that will never be thine?
"But mine, but mine," so I swore to the rose,
"For ever and ever, mine."

VI

And the soul of the rose went into my blood,
As the music clash'd in the hall;
And long by the garden lake I stood,
For I heard your rivulet fall
From the lake to the meadow and on to the wood,
Our wood, that is dearer than all;

VII

From the meadow your walks have left so sweet
That whenever a March-wind sighs
He sets the jewel-print of your feet
In violets blue as your eyes,
To the woody hollows in which we meet
And the valleys of Paradise.

VIII

The slender acacia would not shake
One long milk-bloom on the tree;
The white lake-blossom fell into the lake
As the pimpernel dozed on the lea;
But the rose was awake all night for your sake,
Knowing your promise to me;
The lilies and roses were all awake,
They sigh'd for the dawn and thee.

IX

Queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls,
Come hither, the dances are done,
In gloss of satin and glimmer of pearls,
Queen lily and rose in one;
Shine out, little head sunning over with curls,
To the flowers, and be their sun.

X

There has fallen a splendid tear
From the passion-flower at the gate.

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She is coming, my dove, my dear;
She is coming, my life, my fate.
The red rose cries, "She is near, she is near;"
And the white rose weeps, "She is late;"
The larkspur listens, "I hear, I hear;"
And the lily whispers, "I wait."

XI

She is coming, my own, my sweet;
Were it ever so airy a tread,
My heart would hear her and beat,
Where it earth in an earthy bed;
My dust would hear her and beat,
Had I lain for a century dead,
Would start and tremble under her feet,
And blossom in purple and red.

(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

The Lyric : Its Popularity

"Come into the Garden, Maud", is the sweetest lyric in *Maud, a Monodrama,* which is essentially a series of lyrics narrating the love-story of Maud and her neurotic, almost mad lover. The lyric has justly enjoyed wide popularity and finds a place of honour in all anthologies of English lyrics. It stands as the crown and climax to the first 850 lines of the poem, coming as it does at a crucial moment in the story.

The Context

Maud has already accepted the neurotic lover and has agreed to marry him. Then her brother returns from abroad and wants her to pay heed to the address of the Lord of the Hall, who is a man of rank and position. One night there is a dance at Maud's mansion, but the lover is not invited to it. All night he stands alone in her rose-garden and listens to the revelry within. The lyric is an out-pouring of his emotions; it comes direct from the heart of the lover, and so goes direct to the heart of the readers.

Substance

The lyric begins with a description of the nature-background. The night is already over, the stars above have turned pale, and the planet Venus, too, has grown faint. Sweet morning breezes blow and fragrance, like incense, is wafted about. All night the roses have kept awake with him, and listened to the sound of revelry coming from within. But now with the morning the din of merry-making has ended and silence has fallen over the house. The lover pours out his passion to the various flowers who seem to him to share his

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own eager expectancy, for the time is near when Maud would come to him. It is day dawn, the dancers have all departed, and the time has now come when she would come to him dressed in satin and pearls, "*Queen lily and rose in one*". As her footsteps are heard, the flowers in the garden listen intently with the lover, with his own anxiety and suspense. Maud does come. She meets her lover, but she is soon followed by her brother. The two quarrel and there is dire tragedy.

Its Poignancy : The Personal Element

Come into the Garden, Maud, is an intense and poignant love layric, and it derives much of its poignancy from the fact that Tennyson has put much of himself into the hero of the poem. **Mr. Rader** has examined the matter in detail and he finds the lyric of far-reaching autobiographical significance. It is a record of the poet's own soul, an outpouring of his own heart. Tennyson loved two women passionately. He loved Emily Sellwood whom he ultimately married and he also loved Sophy Rawnsley whom he did not marry. These two women stood in Tennyson's mind for two distinct types of womanhood, and these types in his poetry are symbolised by the rose and the lily. Maud combines in herself the beauties of both these women, and so she is, "Queen lily and rose in one". Tennyson also loved a third woman, Rosa Baring, and she always supposed that, "rose of the rosebud garden of girls", referred to her.

Use of Pathetic Fallacy

Thus the lyric embodies the heart-throbs of the poet himself, and its poignancy is further heightened by the fact that not only has the poet identified himself with the neurotic lover, but also with the external world. He pours out his passion to the rose and the lily, they wake and watch with him and listen with his own eager expectancy to the footsteps of Maud. Lines like the following are among the supreme examples of *pathetic fallacy* in all Tennyson :

The lilies and roses are all awake,
They sighed for the dawn and thee.

and,

The red rose cries, "She is near, she is near,"
And the white rose weeps, "she is late."

A Pure Lyric : Its Imagery

The poem has the various qualities which a good lyric should have. It is a 'pure' lyric, a lyric unmixed with reflection, a spontaneous outpouring of the soul. It is short and it is characterised by simplicity and clarity. It has been admired for its music and melody by all critics of Tennyson, and the music is created by the various devices usual to the poet. The poet's fancy works at white heat and inspired images come out of his pen, like sparks from a

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chimney-fire. One of the most fanciful, apt and vivid of the images in the poem is the following :

He sets the jewel-print of your feet
In violets blue as your eyes.

Lines like. *"Queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls"* and *"Queen lily and rose in one"*, are ample testimony to the poet's felicity and perfection of expression.

In short, in this beautiful song of rapturous expectation, the poet rises to the highest point of his lyrical verse.

(c) CRITICAL NOTES, COMMENTS, ETC.

The black bat, night—to the heated of imagination of Maud's neurotic lover, night appears to be a black bat. Revelry in Maud's mansion has gone on all night and now it is almost day break.

The woodlime spices...abroad—the fragrant pollen of the woodlime is being scattered in all directions of the wind.

And the musk...blown—the fragrance of the rose is also being wafted along.

The planet of love—The planet Venus, the Greek goddess of love and beauty.

To faint—to appear dim. *In the light that she loves*—the light of the sun.

On a bed of daffodil sky—the sky studded with stars, looking pale with the advent of morning. The pale stars have been likened to daffodils.

The flute, violin and bassoon—The names of various musical instruments which are being played upon in the mansion, and the soft notes of which have come out into the garden.

Casement Jessamine—The Jessamine creeper spread over the window. *Stirred*—danced, as if in tune with the dancing within.

Till a silence...setting moon—till the revelry came to an end with day-break.

I said to the lily etc.—Maud's lover who was not invited to the revelry within, has waited for her all night in the garden. He has poured out his passion to the various flowers in the garden.

There is but one—*i.e.* the lover himself. *Has heart to be gay*—can be happy only in his company.

Now half to the...day—some of the dancers left with the setting of the Moon, and the others with the day rise. So, Maud should now come to him.

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Babble—idle chatter. *Revel and wine*—dancing and merry-making.

O young lord-lover...never be thine—the young lover speaks to himself. It is in vain for him to sigh, for Maud for she would never be his. But in the very next line he assures himself that Maud has already accepted him and would be his for ever.

Your rivulet—the stream flowing through Maud's garden.

Our wood...than all—the wood is most dear to the lover, for it has been the scene of their love-making.

He sets the jewel-print...as your eyes—A highly poetic and fanciful image. The foot-prints of Maud appear to the lover jewel-like. As the March wind blows, petals of blue violets are scattered round her foot-prints which then look beautiful like rubies in a turquoise setting.

The woody hollows—Shaded, secluded spots in the wood. *Valley of paradise*—valleys as beautiful as Paradise itself.

The slender acacia—the acacia with its slender, thin stem. *Milk-bloom*—white flower. *Lake-bloom*—the name of another white flower, growing on the shores of the lake. *The pimpernal dozed*—the pimpernal hangs down, like the head of a drowsy person. *The lea*—the meadows.

But the rose was...dawn and thee—while the other flowers slept, the rose and the lily were awake all night anxiously waiting for the arrival of Maud, like the lover himself. It is a fine example of what Ruskin called pathetic fallacy, *i.e.* a figure of speech in which human emotions are attributed to the objects of nature. In Tennyson, nature is always coloured by human moods and emotions.

Queen rose...of girls—the most beautiful of the maidens, just as rose is the most beautiful of flowers.

In gloss of satin...of pearls—in a beautiful satin gown red like the rose, and decorated with glimmering pearls like lily flowers.

Queen lily and rose in one—Maud combines the beauty both of the rose and the lily. The line is of great autobiographical significance. Tennyson loved Sophy Rawnsley passionately, but he could not marry her. He also loved and married Emily Sellwood. **Mr. Rader** suggests that the two women stood in Tennyson's mind for two distinct types of womanhood and the rose and the lily are their respective symbols in his poetry. Maud combines in herself the qualities of both. She has the beauties of both the girls and the deficiencies of neither.

Sunning over with curls—with her face covered over with beautiful bright locks of hair.

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There has fallen a splendid star...I wait—the various flowers in the garden share the eager, expectancy of the lover as Maud's footsteps are heard. Another example of pathetic fallacy.

Airy tread—a step, light and soundless, like the blowing of a gentle breeze.

Were it earth...bed—even when he was dead and buried.

Had I lain for a hundred years—even if he had been dead and buried for many years.

And blossom...red—if Maud walked over his grave, his grave, his dust, would grow out and bloom in the form of beautiful flowers.

———

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24

Elegiac Note in Tennyson's Poetry

The Poet's Melancholy and Sadness

It was in the Victorian era that, for the first time, pessimism became a force in English poetry. With the rise of evolutionary science and the spirit of rationalism, faith both in God and Nature was shaken and man, "felt orphan and defrauded", lonely and helpless. The old order was changing, but the new was not yet born. Doubts and uncertainties beset the human soul, and under the circumstances despair and melancholy were but natural. This note of melancholy runs through the literature of the age. Matthew Arnold, Edward Fitzgerald, Thomas Hardy, all voice this pessimism, and Tennyson was no exception. Indeed, so well marked and all-pervasive is the note of sadness in his poetry, that **T.S. Eliot** calls him, "*the saddest of all poets*", and **W.H. Auden** goes to the extent of saying, "There was little about melancholia that Tennyson did not know, there was little else that he did."

Its Causes

The influence of the age combined with a number of other causes to make his despair and melancholy so poignant and pervasive. First, by temperament he was given to sadness. As a child he was moody and aloof, often wandering about by himself for hours together. Secondly, his father was a disinherited son, and as a result he was frustrated, embittered and often mentally deranged. Tennyson inherited this melancholy from his father. Thirdly, this abnormality of the head of the family, subjected him to severe stress and strains from childhood onwards. His childhood was not a normal, happy one. Fourthly, there was the poverty of the family, poverty which compelled him to leave the university without taking his degree, and after his father's death he had to shoulder the heavy burden of supporting and looking after the family. Then came the harsh reviews of his poems and frustration and failure in love. The shock of Hallam's death in 1833 deepened and aggravated his melancholia and morbidity and, as a consequence, elegiac note is to be heard in the bulk of his poetry.

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His Poetry : The Note of Sadness

The elegiac note in Tennyson's poetry appears quite early. It is there even in the poems of the volume of 1833. *The Lady of Shallot* is a lonely, tragic figure, "sick of shadows", living under a curse, and finally dying a tragic death. In *The Palace of Art*, the soul ultimately falls in despair and finds, "no comfort anywhere". Tithonus doomed to immortality and old age is a sad, pathetic figure wandering amongst strangers like a ghost. The Lotos-Eaters are weighed down with weariness, and suffer from a nameless melancholy. They would like to lie down and give themselves over to, "mild-eyed melancholy". The hero of *Locksley Hall* is frustrated and embittered as a result of the faithlessness of the, 'shallow-hearted', Amy, and fulminates bitterly against womankind and against the times which seem to him out of joint. *Tears, Idle Tears* expresses the tender melancholy, vague regrets and longings of a life lived without love. *Crossing the Bar* expresses the poet's premonition of his own approaching death, and *Break, Break, Break*, inspired by the death of Hallam, is one of the most poignant of elegiac lyrics. Any sad tragic event inspired him to song and he could write an immortal Ode even on the death of the Duke of Wellington.

His Heroes : Their Loneliness

It is to be noted that most of Tennyson's protagonists are sad, melancholy figures, isolated and cut off, mentally deranged or suffering from some other abnormality. Thus Ulysses cannot adjust himself to the life in the island, and so must go out and wander, and Tithonus roams about like a ghost among strangers and curses his immortality. The Lady of Shallot is a lonely figure, living all alone under a tragic curse, and the hero of *Locksley Hall* is a lonely, suffering soul with no bonds of sympathy with any one. After the death of King Arthur, Sir Bedivere is left standing all alone on the shore, and the lover of Maud is a mentally deranged person who, frustrated in love, goes out to war. All these lonely, melancholy figures are projections of the different facets of the poet's personality ; they but reflect his own despair and loneliness of spirit

'In Memoriam' as an Elegy

The elegiac note looms large in the poetry of Tennyson, and his *In Memoriam* is the greatest of elegies in the English language. It was inspired by the death of the poet's intimate friend Arthur Hallam, and as its title indicates, it was written in his memory and it immortalises that memory. But *In Memoriam* would not be a great work of art, if it were merely the embodiment of personal grief In fact *In Memoriam* is much more than that ; it is also an expression of the poet's reflections on God, Nature, soul, and the mystery of life and death. It also expresses the doubts and uncertainties of the age. Indeed, the best and most lyrical passages in the elegy are

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those where the poet becomes the conscience and voice of the age and gives poetic form to its spiritual troubles.

Its Superiority

The superiority of *In Memoriam* to other great elegies, like *Lycidas*, *Adonais*, and *Thyrsis*, lies in the fact that the poet's expression of grief is direct, unhampered by the pastoral convention, and so has greater ring of sincerity and greater intensity. Not only is *In Memoriam* superior as an expression of grief, it is superior in another respect also. As **Perceival** points out, besides the elegy, there also runs a theology. It is also an expression of the poet's views on God, Nature, Immortality of the soul, and the mystery of life and death. It traces the way of the soul from grief and despair, through the conquest of that despair, to ultimate hope and joy. It is a record of Tennyson's spiritual troubles, and as his spiritual troubles are also those of his age, *In Memoriam* is also a valuable social document, a faithful record of the doubts and uncertainties, hopes and aspirations of the times in which it was written. Evolutionary science had given a knock out blow to the traditional theories of creation, and faith both in God and Nature was shaken. *In Memoriam* reflects this loss of faith. If God is merciful, and he has a holy plan, why is there so much of suffering, such brutal struggle for existence, and pain and death ? Thus in Tennyson's breast, and in the age, there was a conflict between science and religion. God's omnipotence and His Love were hard to reconcile with the fact of suffering. Tennyson's plea is for a compromise between science and religion, and he stresses that such a reconciliation can be possible only through faith, and not through knowledge. The best and most lyrical parts of *In Memoriam* are those in which he becomes the voice of the human race and deals with problems which exercised his age, and which have always exercised mankind. In short, *'In Memoriam' is an epitome of its age, which the other elegies are not. In this respect Tennyson's elegy stands alone in the whole range of literature.*

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25

From "In Memoriam"

[*In Memoriam* is an Elegy as well as a series of 131 sweet, musical, elegiac lyrics inspired by the death of the poet's intimate friend Arthur Hallam. It is one of the finest elegies in the English language, as well as one of the greatest poems of the 19th century. It is an expression of the poet's grief, as well as a record of the doubts and uncertainties which beset his soul. As his doubts and fears are also the doubts and fears of the age, *In Memoriam* is also a social document of great value and significance.

Arthur Hallam was a young man of great promise who was the poet's college-mate, and who died at Vienna in 1833. The immortal elegy was first published anonymously in 1850, seventeen years after Hallam's death. This shows that the poet brooded long and deep over his loss, and ultimately expressed it. It is the history of a tender human soul confronted with stern, relentless order of the universe and the seeming waste and cruelty of death. "The poem traces the progress of sorrow from the valley of death, over-shadowed by the darkness of unspeakable loss, through the regions of philosophic doubts and meditation to the serene heights of resignation and hope, where Faith and Love triumph over Death in the confidence of a life beyond, and over, Doubt."]

(*a*) THE POEM

Calm is the morn without a sound,
  Calm as to suit a calmer grief,
  And only thro' the faded leaf
The chestnut pattering to the ground ;

Calm and deep peace on this high wold,
  And on these dews that drench the furze,
  And all the silvery gossamers
That twinkle into green and gold ;

Calm and still light on yon great plain
  That sweeps with all its autumn bowers,
  And crowded farms and lessening towers ;
To mingle with the bounding main ;

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Calm and deep peace in this wide air,
These leaves that redden to the fall,
And in my heart, if calm at all,
If any calm, a calm despair ;

Calm on the seas, and silver sleep,
And waves that sway themselves in rest,
And dead calm in that noble breast
Which heaves but with the heaving deep. 20

(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

The present lyric forms section XI of *In Memoriam*. In Tennyson's immortal Elegy Sections IX—XVII form a single clustre or group. The spirit of calm and beauty which is breathed by sections IX and X culminates in this exquisite lyric. The time is the early morning of an autumn day, the scene a Lincolnshire down or field from which a great plain sweeps to the eastern sea. The sight of the sea carries the poet's mind to the Mediterranean, the ship, and its freight (the body of his dead friend) by a transition of wonderful dignity and pathos.

"Throughout the lyric, nature is in harmony with the mood of the poet, the poet's own calm is reflected in the calm of nature, and the autumn season provides a suitable background to his grief and despair." The tender pathos of the closing stanza has been commented upon appreciatively by all critics of Tennyson.

(*c*) CRITICAL NOTES, COMMENTS, ETC.

A calmer grief—calmer than that of the poet ; or a grief' "grown more calm", with the passing of time.

The faded leaf—the leaf is faded because it is autumn season.

And only through.....to the ground—the only sound to be heard is the sound made by a Chestnut falling on the ground. *Pattering* is expressive of the exact sound made by the falling chestnut. *Wold*—"some Lincolnshire down to which the poet has gone, and from which he commands a view of the country round", and of the sea (**Perceival**). It is 'high', as it is situated on the slope of a hill.

Drench—make wet. *Furze*—a wild bush.

Gossamers—the thin, filmy substance that is often seen floating in the air in calm weather.

Twinkle into green and gold—as the dew drops on the gossamers catch the sun. An instance of Tennyson's minuteness of observation.

That sweeps—that is spread wide ; that opens out to the sea.

Bowers—group of trees.

Lessening towers—church-towers, becoming smaller in the distance, and then fading from view.

Bounding—limiting. *Main*—sea.

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To mingle with.....main—the field is spread upto the sea, which limits its wide expanse.

These leaves that.....fall—it is autumn the leaves are turning yellow and then red, and falling.

A calm despair—the poet's grief has grown calmer with the passing of time, but there is despair in his heart, for he knows that his friend will never live again.

Silver sleep—the surface of the calm sea, shining bright in the light of the early morning sun.

And waves that.....in rest—the waves are asleep. Their rise and fall is being compared to the heaving of the breast of a sleeping person.

That noble breast—his friend, Arthur Hallam.

Dead calm—the calm of death.

Which heaves.....deep—the poet's thoughts turn to the body of his dead friend which is being brought home in a ship. His 'noble breast', rises and falls, not with breathing as in life, but with the rise and fall of the waves.

(*a*) THE POEM

RING OUT, WILD BELLS

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty light :
The year is dying in the night ;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring, happy bells, across the snow :
The year is going, let him go ;
Ring out the false, ring in the true.

Ring out the grief that saps the mind,
For those that here we see no more ;
Ring out the feud of rich and poor,
Ring in redress to all mankind.

Ring out a slowly dying cause,
And ancient forms of party strife ;
Ring in the nobler modes of life,
With sweeter manners, purer laws.

Ring out the want, the care, the sin,
The faithless coldness of the times ;
Ring out, ring out my mournful rhymes,
But ring the fuller minstrel in.

Ring out false pride in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite ;
Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good.

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Right out old shapes of foul disease ;
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold ;
Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand ;
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.

(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

The Source

This beautiful lyric has been taken from Part IV of *In Memoriam*. It is the third Christmas after the death of the poet's intimate friend, Arthur Hallam. "The poet turns away from the past and its grief, which saps the mind, and looks to the future and his hopes for mankind."

Central Idea

According to custom, in Christian countries on the night of December 31, church-bells are set ringing till the midnight, when they stop for some time to indicate the departure of the old year and the arrival of the new one. Then they again resume ringing and continue the whole night. The poet wishes that just as the old year passes by and rejoicings take place as the new year comes in, so should all that is weak, degrading, and discordent be pressed out of the lives of nations, to be replaced by all that is strong, ennobling, and peace-giving. The bells tolling out the old year and tolling in the New Year are welcome. "Let them peal out with all their might, and tell of the good time coming. Out with the evil old ; and in with the better and happier, because the more really Christian, New."

As a Social Document

This brief lyric in itself is an important social document and refers to many of contemporary social ills which the poet wants to be rung out with the old year. Tennyson wrote at a time when Britain's sole god was the millionaire and the society had been degraded by the worship of Mammon (*'narrowing lust of gold'*). It was a time of doubt and restlessness, the old order was passing away, and men's minds were troubled. Men were losing faith in religion as a result of scientific developments, (*'faithless coldness of the time'*).

Society at that time was sharply divided into the rich and the poor. The poor were largely illiterate, and so inarticulate. The cultured were a class apart. They took little interest in the lives of the poor, until they were forced to do so. Modern sociologists have drawn lurid pictures of the conditions of the working classes, during the early part of the last century. Over-population and fluctuation in price were the main causes of this misery, but the situation was worsened by the Irish Potato Famine in 1845. The hungry and the naked, supported by Cobden and Bright, Peel and Gladstone, were

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attempting to get their miseries alleviated (*'the feud of rich and poor'*). Their efforts produced *the Poor Law of 1844, the Factory Law of 1833, the Reform Bill of 1832*, and the repeal of *Corn Law in 1846*. But much was yet to be done ; and hence Tennyson prays for, *'the redress to all mankind.'* This naturally aroused the jealousy of other classes, and party politics, assumed a fiercer aspect (*'ancient forms of party strife'*) and the two parties resorted to all sorts of idle calumny and pamphleteering. The journals were the mouth-pieces of one party or the other (*'the civic slander and the spite'*).

The Victorians cared more for outward forms of worship than for truth and frankness. Tennyson, a child of his age, naturally longs for, *'nobler modes of life with sweeter manners'*, and, *'the common love of good'*. Their rapid progress brought in its wake extreme departmental inefficiency and the administration of law greatly suffered. One side of Westminster Hall gave judgments, which the other side restrained the successful party from enforcing. The bewildered litigant was driven backwards and forwards. Hence Tennyson's desire for, *'purer laws'*.

Among other evils, the chief were the Slave Trade, Plague and Ague, and War. The first attempt to root out the slave trade was made in 1808, but it was not till 1833 that it was crushed out (*'slowly dying cause'*). Jenner's discovery of vaccination in 1798 and the draining of marshes greatly stopped mortality by Plague and Ague ; but they were still wide spread and showed the imperfection of our medical science (*'old shapes of foul disease'*). *The Opium War* against China and *the Crimean War* and the rivelry between England and France are referred to as *'the thousand wars of old'*.

(*c*) NOTES, COMMENTS, EXPLANATIONS, ETC.

Stanza 1

Wild bells—bells ringing violently at mid-night on December 31, to welcome the New Year.

Wild sky—rough wintry sky.

Flying—floating in the sky, driven by the wind.

Frosty light—The light of the stars penetrating through the frost and appearing more bright.

Dying—departing ; passing.

In the night—at the dead of night.

Him—the old year.

Stanza 2

Ring out the old—bid farewell to the old year with your ringing sounds.

Happy bells—'happy', because they are to announce the arrival of a more prosperous year.

Across the snow—all over England which is covered with snow.

Ring out the false, etc.—the poet hopes that with the death of the old year, the false will die and the true will come in.

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The false—includes (1) false friends, (2) false hopes, and (3) hypocrisy.

Saps the mind—undermines the energy of the mind.

Stanza 3

The joy and peace attained by the poet are yet unable to make him forget his grief for his dear friend. But he hopes that his grief, too, will come to an end with the death of the old year.

That here we see no more—Those who are dead and gone.

Feud of rich and poor—struggle between capital and labour ; quarrels due to class-distinction or inequality.

Redress to all mankind—Justice for all.

Stanza 4

Slowly dying cause—Principles and ideals that are out worn. The slow death of the cause indicates that it has grown old and hence useless. It is better that it should die out and give place to an ideal which will be of greater help to mankind.

Party strife—struggle of political parties, the Whig and the Tory.

Sweeter manners—nobler rules of etiquette.

Purer laws—more impartial and just laws.

Stanza 5

The want—poverty.

Faithless coldness—indifference in spiritual matters.

My mournful rhymes—sad songs, as the present elegy.

The fuller minstrel—a more perfect poet ; the singer full of hope and joy.

Stanza 6

Place—high social position.

Blood—noble birth.

False pride in place and blood—pride of office and pride of birth.

Civic slander—scandal-mongering, abusing each other behind the back.

Spite—ill-will ; malice.

Right—virtue ; justice.

Common love of good—a common desire to do noble deeds.

Stanza 7

Old shapes of foul disease—forms of sickness which have been long prevalent, *e.g.*, plague, ague, etc.

Narrowing lust of gold—that hankering after wealth which makes men narrow-minded and selfish. Wealth narrows the heart, and is destructive of nobility and generosity of feelings.

Of old—coming from ancient times. *The thousand years of peace*—The millenium or the thousand years of peace promised in *the Bible*.

———

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26

Locksley Hall

(*a*) THE POEM

COMRADES, leave me here a little, while as yet 'tis early morn;
Leave me here, and when you want me, sound upon the buglehorn.

'Tis the place, and all around it, as of old, the curlews call,
Dreary gleams about the moorland flying over Locksley Hall;

Locksley Hall, that in the distance overlooks the sandy tracts,
And the hollow ocean-ridges roaring into cataracts.

Many a night from yonder ivied casement, ere I went to rest,
Did I look on great Orion sloping slowly to the west.

Many a night I saw the Pleiads, rising thro' the mellow shade,
Glitter like a swarm of fireflies tangled in a silver braid.

Here about the beach I wander'd, nourishing a youth sublime
With the fairy tales of science, and the long result of time;

When the centuries behind me like a fruitful land reposed;
When I clung to all the present for the promise that it closed;

When I dipt into the future far as human eye could see,
Saw the vision of the world and all the wonder that would be.

In the spring a fuller crimson comes upon the robin's breast;
In the spring the wanton lapwing gets himself another crest;

In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnish'd dove;
In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.

Then her cheek was pale and thinner than should be for one so young,
And her eyes on all my motions with a mute observance hung.

And I said, "My cousin Amy, speak, and speak the truth to me,
Trust me, cousin, all the current of my being sets to thee."

On her pallid cheek and forehead came a color and a light,
As I have seen the rosy red flushing in the northern night.

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And she turn'd—her bosom shaken with a sudden storm of sighs—
All the spirit deeply dawning in the dark of hazel eyes—
Saying, "I have hid my feelings, fearing they should do me wrong;"
Saying, "Dost thou love me, cousin?" weeping, "I have loved thee long."

Love took up the glass of Time, and turn'd it in his glowing hands;
Every moment, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands.

Love took up the harp of Life, and smote on all the chords with might;
Smote the chord of Self, that, trembling, part in music out of sight.

Many a morning on the moorland did we hear the copses ring,
And her whisper throng'd my pulses with the fulness of the spring.

Many an evening by the waters did we watch the stately ships,
And our spirits rush'd together at the touching of the lips.

O my cousin, shallow-hearted! O my Amy, mine no more!
O the dreary, dreary moorland! O the barren, barren shore!

Falser than all fancy fathoms, falser than all songs have sung,
Puppet to a father's threat, and servile to a shrewish tongue!

Is it well to wish thee happy?—having known me—to decline
On a range of lower feelings and a narrower heart than mine!

Yet it shall be; thou shalt lower to his level day by day,
What is fine within thee growing coarse to sympathize with clay.

As the husband is, the wife is; thou art mated with a clown,
And the grossness of his nature will have weight to drag thee down.

He will hold thee, when his passion shall have spent its novel force,
Something better than his dog, a little dearer than his horse.

What is this? his eyes are heavy; think not they are glazed with wine.
Go to him, it is thy duty; kiss him, take his hand in thine.

It may be my lord is weary, that his brain is overwrought;
Soothe him with thy finer fancies, touch him with thy lighter thought.

He will answer to the purpose, easy things to understand—
Better thou wert dead before me, tho' I slew thee with my hand!

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Better thou and I were lying, hidden from the heart's disgrace,
Roll'd in one another's arms, and silent in a last embrace.

Cursed be the social wants that sin against the strength of youth!
Cursed be the social lies that warp us from the living truth!
Cursed be the sickly forms that err from honest Nature's rule!
Cursed be the gold that gilds the straiten'd forehead of the fool!

Well—'t is well that I should bluster!—Hadst thou less unworthy proved—
Would to God—for I had loved thee more than ever wife was loved.

Am I mad, that I should cherish that which bears but bitter fruit?
I will pluck it from my bosom, tho' my heart be at the root.

Never, tho' my mortal summers to such length of years should come
As the many-winter'd crow that leads the clanging rookery home.

Where is comfort? in division of the records of the mind?
Can I part her from herself, and love her, as I knew her, kind?

I remember one that perish'd; sweetly did she speak and move;
Such a one do I remember, whom to look at was to love.

Can I think of her as dead, and love her for the love she bore?
No—she never loved me truly; love is love for evermore.

Comfort? comfort scorn'd of devils! this is truth the poet sings,
That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things.

Drug thy memories, lest thou learn it, lest thy heart be put to proof
In the dead unhappy night, and when the rain is on the roof.

Like a dog, he hunts in dreams, and thou art staring at the wall,
Where the dying night-lamp flickers, and the shadows rise and fall.

Then a hand shall pass before thee, pointing to his drunken sleep,
To thy widow'd marriage-pillows, to the tears that thou wilt weep.

Thou shalt hear the, "Never, never," whisper'd by the phantom years,
And a song from out the distance in the ringing of thine ears;

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And an eye shall vex thee, looking ancient kindness on thy pain
Turn thee, turn thee on thy pillow; get thee to thy rest again.
Nay, but Nature brings thee solace; for a tender voice will cry.
'Tis a purer life than thine, a lip to drain thy trouble dry.
Baby lips will laugh me down; my latest rival brings thee rest.
Baby fingers, waxen touches, press me from the mother's breast.
O, the child too clothes the father with a dearness not his due.
Half is thine and half is his; it will be worthy of the two.
O, I see thee old and formal, fitted to thy petty part,
With a little hoard of maxims preaching down a daughter's heart.
"They were dangerous guides the, feelings—she herself was not exempt—
Truly, she herself had suffer'd"—Perish in thy self-contempt!
Overlive it—lower yet—be happy! wherefore should I care?
I myself must mix with action, lest I wither by despair.
What is that which I should turn to, lighting upon days like these?
Every door is barr'd with gold, and opens but to golden keys.
Every gate is throng'd with suitors, all the markets overflow.
I have but an angry fancy; what is that which I should do?
I had been content to perish, falling on the foeman's ground.
When the ranks are roll'd in vapor, and the winds are laid with sound.
But the jingling of the guineas helps the hurt that Honor feels,
And the nations do but murmur, snarling at each other's heels.
Can I but relive in sadness? I will turn that earlier page.
Hide me from my deep emotion, O thou wondrous Mother-Age!
Make me feel the wild pulsation that I felt before the strife,
When I heard my days before me, and the tumult of my life;
Yearning for the large excitement that the coming years would yield,
Eager-hearted as a boy when first he leaves his father's field,
And at night along the dusky highway near and nearer drawn,
Sees in heaven the light of London flaring like a dreary dawn;

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And his spirit leaps within him to be gone before him then,
Underneath the light he looks at, in among the throngs of men ;

Men, my brothers, men the workers, ever reaping something new ;
That which they have done but earnest of the things that they shall do.

For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be ;

Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales ;

Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rain'd a ghastly dew
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue ;

Far along the world-wide whisper of the south-wind rushing warm,
With the standards of the peoples plunging thro' the thunder-storm ;

Till the war-drum throbb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were furl'd
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.

There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful realm in awe,
And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal law.

So I triumph'd ere my passion sweeping thro' me left me dry,
Left me with the palsied heart, and left me with the jaundiced eye ;

Eye, to which all order festers, all things here are out of joint.
Science moves, but slowly, slowly, creeping on from point to point ;

Slowly comes a hungry people, as a lion, creeping nigher,
Glares at one that nods and winks behind a slowly-dying fire.

Yet I doubt not thro' the ages one increasing purpose runs,
And the thoughts of men are widen'd with the process of the suns.

What is that to him that reaps not harvest of his youthful joys,
Tho' the deep heart of existence beat for ever like a boy's ?

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Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers, and I linger on the shore,
And the individual withers, and the world is more and more.
Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers, and he bears a laden breast,
Full of sad experience, moving toward the stillness of his rest.
Hark, my merry comrades call me, sounding on the bugle-horn.
They to whom my foolish passion were a target for their scorn.
Shall it not be scorn to me to harp on such a moulder'd string?
I am shamed thro' all my nature to have loved so slight a thing.
Weakness to be wrath with weakness! woman's pleasure, woman's pain—
Nature made them blinder, motions bounded in a shallower brain.
Woman is the lesser man, and all thy passions, match'd with mine,
Are as moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine—
Here at least, where nature sickens, nothing. Ah, for some retreat
Deep in yonder shining Orient, where my life began to beat,
Where in wild Mahratta-battle fell my father evil-starr'd;—
I was left a trampled orphan, and a selfish uncle's ward.
Or to burst all links of habit—there to wander far away,
On from island unto island at the gateways of the day.
Larger constellations burning, mellow moons and happy skies,
Breadths of tropic shade and palms in cluster, knots of Paradise.
Never comes the trader, never floats an European flag,
Slides the bird o'er lustrous woodland, swings the trailer from the crag;
Droops the heavy-blossom'd bower, hangs the heavy-fruited tree—
Summer isles of Eden lying in dark-purple spheres of sea.
There methinks would be enjoyment more than in this march of mind,
In the steamship, in the railway, in the thoughts that shake mankind.
There the passions, cramp'd no longer, shall have scope and breathing space;
I will take some savage woman, she shall rear my dusky race.

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Iron-jointed, supple-sinew'd, they shall dive, and they shall run,
Catch the wild goat by the hair, and hurl their lances in the sun ;
Whistle back the parrot's call, and leap the rainbows of the brooks,
Not with blinded eyesight poring over miserable books—
Fool, again the dream, the fancy ! but I *know* my words are wild,
But I count the gray barbarian lower than the Christian child.

I, to herd with narrow foreheads, vacant of our glorious gains,
Like a beast with lower pleasures, like a beast with lower pains !
Mated with a squalid savage—what to me were sun or clime ?
I the heir of all the ages, in the foremost files of time—
I that rather held it better men should perish one by one,
Than that earth should stand at gaze like Joshua's moon in Ajalon !
Not in vain the distance beacons. Forward, forward let us range,
Let the great world spin for ever, down the ringing grooves of change.

Thro' the shadow of the globe we sweep into the younger day ;
Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay.
Mother-Age,—for mine I knew not,—help me as when life begun ;
Rift the hills, and roll the waters, flash the lightnings, weigh the sun.

O, I see the crescent promise of my spirit hath not set.
Ancient founts of inspiration well thro' all my fancy yet.
Howsoever these things be, a long farewell to Locksley Hall !
Now for me the woods may wither, now for me the roof-tree fall.

Comes a vapor from the margin, blackening over heath and holt,
Cramming all the blast before it, in its breast a thunderbolt.
Let it fall on Locksley Hall, with rain or hail, or fire or snow ;
For the mighty wind arises, roaring seaward, and I go.

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(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION— CRITICAL SUMMARY

Its Publication : Its Tone

Locksley Hall was written about the year 1835 and first published in the *Poems*, 1842. The poem is fully expressive of the mood of the poet at the time of writing. According to **Hallam Tennyson**, his father regarded this, and the sequel (*Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*), as, "likely to be in the future two of the most historically interesting of his poems, as descriptive of the tone of the age at two distant periods of his life." Tennyson did not like the biographical interpretation of the poem, and said : "*Locksley Hall is an imaginary place and the hero is imaginary. The whole poem represents young life, its good side, its deficiencies, and its yearnings.*" But there can be no denying the fact that the poet's own broken romance with Rosa Baring and the resulting frustration contributed much to the tone of the poem.

The Setting

Locksley Hall is a Dramatic Monologue. Its speaker, the central figure, is a youngman who was left an orphan early in life, somewhere in India, where his father was killed in a Marahatta-battle. He was then brought to England and was brought up at Locksley Hall by a tyrannical uncle. Critics have attempted to locate Locksley Hall, and identify it with particular buildings, but with little success. It is an imaginary place, and the utmost that can be said is that it must have been situated near the Lincolnshire coast, for there the sea is magnificent : there are sandy tracts, "And the hollow ocean-ridges roaring into cataracts." The wild setting of the Hall accords well with the wildness of Lincolnshire.

A Dramatic Monologue : Critical Summary

It was at Locksley Hall that the speaker fell passionately and violently in love with his cousin Amy. He loved her truly and devotedly, but she did not prove worthy of him. Over-awed by the threats of her father and persuaded by the wise maxims of her mother, she agreed to marry another who had gold, but who could never love her as he loved her. Frustrated and despairing, he left Locksley Hall to go out into the wide world. As the poem opens, we find that the speaker has just returned to the scene of his love after a lapse of years. He asks his companions to leave him alone for sometime, and when alone indulges in this long monologue which gives us a peep into his soul, and brings out all the bitterness and frustration within him. The impression that we gather of him is that he was once a noble adventurous youth who could have done much in life, but frustrated love has warpped and twisted his personality and turned him into a prig, boastful, blustering, vain and conceited.

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There was a time when he was young, when he nourished his fancy on tales of science, and had full faith in progress and, the wonder that would be. It was the spring of his life, and in the spring thoughts naturally turn to love. He loved his cousin Amy who at once reciprocated his love saying, "I have loved thee long". For sometime they were all in all to each other. It was the golden time of life with them. But the romance was soon shattered. Cousin Amy proved, "shallow-hearted", "falser than all fancy fathoms", and slavishly agreed to marry another, a person much inferior to her in intelligence, culture and refinement. The speaker's heated imagination carries him off his feet, and he fancies to himself the married life of Amy. He imagines that her husband is a drunken clown, gross and earthly, but Amy like a dutiful wife has to minister to his needs and look to his comfort. It would have been far better for her to have died than to suffer such moral and spiritual degradation.

Married to such a gross husband, who values her only a little more than his dog or horse, Amy often remembers the love of the speaker for her, and at such moments she feels the acutest pain for, "Sorrow, crown of sorrows, is remembering happier things." But then consolation would come to her in the shape of her baby daughter whom, in her own turn, she would nourish upon prudential maxims and teach her, as she was herself taught, to stiffle the passion of the heart. The speaker strikes us as more comic than tragic when he regards Amy's baby daughter as his, "latest rival", whose lips will laugh him down, and whose baby fingers would press him away from the mother's breast.

Womanhood : Cynical Attitude

Frustrated at the faithlessness of Amy, with deep indignation burning in his heart, the speaker rails and fulminates not only at womankind, but on the corrupt and degenerate times as a whole. Cynically he calls woman, "the lesser man", with weaker passions, guided more by irrational impulse than by reason. They are weak and shallow-hearted, they allow themselves to be bullied by their parents into marrying monied fools, and in their turn compel their own daughters into obeying such prudential maxims as were their own undoing. Digusted, the lover decides to, "mix with action", "lest I wither away" .

The Age : Its Evils

But what vocation should he take up ? What are the possibilities open to him ? He finds that he has fallen on a corrupt and degenerate age in which materialism, commercialism, mammon-worship, snobbery and social climbing are rampant. It is an age in which,

Every door is barred with gold, and opens but to golden keys,
Every gate is thronged with suitors, all the markets overflow.

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Power, prestige and authority go with money, and a poor man is insulted and humiliated at every step. There was a time when he had full faith in science and progress, when he had dreamed of a glorious future, a future in which, "argosies of magic sails", will fill the sky, and there would be, "Parliament of men", and "the Federation of mankind", and a golden era of peace and prosperity would be ushered in. The prophetic fervour of Tennyson in this part of the poem has been noted and admired by all readers.

But alas! now his golden dream has been shattered. His dreams that, "the argosies of magic sails", have been used for raining bombs and, 'ghastly dew', on mankind, and instead of the Parliament of man, he sees the nightmare spectacle of people hungry and oppressed, marching forward in revolt, to get their revenge and their rights. Disgusted, and with hot indignation burning in his heart, he decides to leave England and go to some far off tropical country, away from the haunts of civilisation, where life is primitive, peaceful and more in keeping with the laws of nature. In such natural surroundings, he would enjoy life more than, "In the steamship, in the railway, and in the thoughts that shake mankind." There he would marry some, "savage woman", and breed a race of dusky children.

Faith in Science and Progress

However, very soon the speaker's patriotism, his pride in his own country and its progress reasserts itself, and he realises that he, "the heir of all the ages", would never be foolish enough to lower himself to the level of beasts with, "lower pleasure", and, "lower pains". He concludes, "*better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay*". However, he is determined to bid farewell to Locksley Hall for good. With faith in progress—inspired still by the crescent promise of his youth—he will go out : "For the mighty wind arises, roaring seaward, and I go". Where does he intend to go ? The close of the poem has been intentionally left vague and ambiguous, and we cannot say whether like the hero of *Maud*, he, too, goes out to take part in some patriotic war.

Opinion of Critics

Locksley Hall has been highly praised by one critic after another. **Morton Luce** regards it as the central poem in the volume *Poems, 1842*, compares it with *Maud* and writes, "There is the same *outcry* in each against almost exactly the same social abuses; and the same distrust of science, though this is more decided in the latter poem; there is the same consideration of the possible benefits of commerce : of the more possible benefits of war; of patriotism as the moving spring of noble life. In each the love motive is often overmastered by some other, such as patriotism, or war...In *Locksley Hall* and *Maud*, a remedy is proposed for wounded love; in the former it is a prospect of progress, due mostly to science; in *Maud*, where the poet's faith in science has

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been shaken, it lies in the energizing of a nation by war." **Alfred Lyall** pays the following tribute to the poem : "The great and lasting success of *Locksley Hall* shows the power of genius in presenting an ordinary situation poetically; how it can kindle up and transform common emotion, dealing boldly with the facts and feelings of every day life. As a composition, it has great original merit; the even current of blank verse is put aside for a swinging metre, new in English poetry, with rhymed couplets, passionate and picturesque, which follow one another like waves, each of them running directly to its point; and the long nervous lines sustain the rise and fall of varying moods."

The Poem : Some Faults

John Pettigrew, on the other hand, is critical of the poem. He criticises it for its central weakness, *i.e.* its failure to fuse the personal and the social into an integrated whole. In his view, "Despite its popularity and many fine passages, *Locksley Hall* is at best a very indifferent poem. The prosodic pyrotechnics are exciting, but they are also ludicrously inappropriate to their context. Form and content are at odds; the form's dominant impression is one of terrific masculine energy, but the hero is a blustering, egotistic, hysterical nincompoop. Again, while the poem's disjointed structure helps to reflect the hero's chaos of feeling, the work does not, in contrast with *Maud*, satisfactorily fuse its social and personal themes. Further, the purple passages, often lovely in themeselves, are not only unintegrated, but so obviously decorative as to provide, like the metrics, a kind of epitome of the inorganic in their clash with content.

"The weaknesses stem from Tennyson's confusion about his intention, clearly a factor of his inability to distance himself sufficiently from his hero—it is as readily understandable as it is regrettable that the poet and his hero have often been uncritically identified. Tennyson is attempting to exercise memories of an unhappy love affair by embodying them in the ravings of a clown, but he is constantly tripped up by sympathy, even self-identification, with his hero. Satiric comedy demands Bergson's 'anaesthesia of the heart', but Tennyson here, in contrast with *St Simeon Stylites*, is unable to meet the demand." In the opinion of the learned critic, the poem should be read as, "*a kind of comic opera*", not as a poem of praise for progress or as an expression of Tennyson's prophetic vision.

Language and Diction : Imagery

The poem has achieved immortality not far its depth of thought, but for its cluster of golden phrases, and the sheer delight of imagery, diction, and cadence which it provides in such ample measure. A number of lines from the poem have passed into common, everyday household proverbs. To quote only one or two examples at random:—

1. *Knowledge comes but wisdom lingers*
2. *Woman is the lesser man*
3. *Not in vain the distance beacons.*

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Such lines, "ring and swing; they are firm, epigrammatic and memorable. They are a kind of *locus classics* : what oft was thought in Victorian England but never so quotably expressed." (**J. B. Steane**). *It has been said that Tennyson's poetry lives by its imagery, and a number of felicitious poetic images are scattered all over the poem.* For example, there is that exquisite image of Love, with the glass of Time and the Harp of life :

Love took up the glass of Time, and turn'd it in his glowing hands;
Every moment, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands,
Love took up the harp of Life, and smote on all the chords with might;
Smote the chord of self, that, trembling, pass'd in music out of sight.

There is also the highly fanciful image in which the Pleiads is likened to, "a swarm of fire-flies tangled in a silver braid", and the wonderful word-picture of the Spring with its store of new colours and new feathers for the sweet warblers of the air :

Slides the bird o'er lustrous woodland, swings the trailer from the crag;
Droops the heavy-blossom'd bower, hangs the heavy-fruited tree—
Summer isles of Eden lying in dark-purple spheres of sea.

The poem, in short, is a great work of art and should be read and enjoyed as such.

(c) EXPLANATORY AND CRITICAL NOTES

Lines 1-20

Comrades, leave me here a little—the speaker of this dramatic monologue, is a young man who has returned to Locksley Hall after a number of years. It was here that he had been brought up by a tyrannical uncle, it was here that he had fallen in love with the faithless Amy who married another. His return to the scenes and sights of his youth stirs in him old memories and desires, he asks his companions to leave him alone for some time, and pours out his sad reflections in this monologue.

Sound upon the bugle-horn—blow upon the trumpet to call me.

As of old—as in the past when he lived there, and when he loved Amy.

The curlews—a kind of bird.

Dreary gleams—it is a cloudy morning and so the light of the sun is dull and dreary, or it may refer to the dull brightness of curlews flying over the place.

Moorland—wide, open spaces of grassy land ; meadows.

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Locksley Hall—no particular place is meant. It is an imaginary mansion, and its situation is described in the next few lines. The scenery and the sea around suggest Lincolnshire Coast with which the poet was well-familiar.

Overlooks—looks over. *The sandy tracts*—banks of the sea covered with sand ; Sand-dunes of the Lincolnshire Coast.

The hollow.....cataracts—We hear in this the roar of the waves rising high and flinging themselves and breaking on the rocky Lincolnshire coast. *The hollow ocean-ridges*—"the slow arching waves." *Roaring into cataracts*—breaking like cataracts with a roaring sound.

Ivied casement—window covered with ivy creeper. *Orion*—a group or constellation of stars. *Sloping*—declining ; going down.

Pleiads—another group of seven stars.

Glitter like.....fire flies—an exquisite image. The seven stars of the Pleiads are being compared to a group of glow-worms shining brightly. *Tangled*—entangled ; caught. *Braid*—fabric ; cloth.

I wandered—*i.e.* in the past when he lived there. *Nourishing a youth.....of science*—gratifying his lofty, youthful passion for science, which to him was wonderful like a fairy-tale. *The long result of time*—the story of human progress.

The centuries behind me—*i.e.* the past. *Like a fruitful land reposed*—the story of human progress in the past made him have high hopes for the future.

When I clung.....closed—when he valued the achievements of the present, for the promise they held of future glory and greatness.

Dipt—visualised in his imagination. *Saw the vision...would be*—he had vision of the future grandeur and glory, and of the wonderful times that were to come.

Explanation : In the spring...turns to thoughts of love.

With the coming of spring all nature wears a sunnier and more beautiful aspect. There is a glorious renewal of life and all nature is decked out in her very best. The crimson breast of the robin grows more crimson, a more beautiful crest grows on the head of the playful lapwing, a brighter set of rainbow colours appears on the rainbow coloured neck of the pigeon, and in this season a youngman naturally thinks of love. It is all a beautiful piece of nature-description in the spring season.

A livelier iris—a brighter set of rainbow colours. *Burnished*—shining, rainbow-coloured neck of the dove. *Fancy*—imagination.

Lines 21—44

Then—when the speaker, the hero of the poem, first loved Amy.

On all my motions.....observance hung—Looked attentively but silently on all my movements.

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All the current of being sets to thee—my life and my soul is fully attuned to you, and so, for me life will not be possible without you.

Pallid—pale. *Flushing*—making rosy in colour.

All the spirit deeply dawning—her very soul peeped out of her eyes. *Hazel*—light brown like a hazel-nut.

Fearing they should do me wrong—I was afraid it would not be proper for me to express them.

Love took up the glass.....itself in golden sands—the lines describe the rapture of first love through the use of exquisite imagery and language. It was a golden time for them, a time of rare happiness, when every moment was precious and rare like gold. Love held the glass of Time in his hands *i.e.* the time was passed in love-making, and every moment of their life was golden.

Love took up the harp.....in music out of sight—Love is here being compared to a musician and their life to a harp. Love played on their lives and produced sweet, harmonious music, the music of love. They were in such full sympathy with each other, such was their love that all the discordant and jarring elements of self and egoism were silenced and were no longer heard. In other words, they lived for each other without ever thinking of their individual selves.

The copses ring—the woodland echoing with the songs of birds.

And her whispers.....of the spring—as Amy whispered words of love to her lover, he felt the flood of youthful passion overflowing his viens. They were moments when he experienced the supreme ecstary of love

And our spirits.....the lips—as they kissed, their very souls seemed to flow out and mingle.

O, my cousin.....mine no more—the line expresses the poignant grief of the lover at the faithlessness of his cousin Amy who agreed to marry another.

O, the dreary.....barren shore—to the frustrated lover the moors are no longer beautiful and fertile. To him the moors are dull and dreary and the shore barren.

Falser than.....fathoms—her faithlessness is beyond the reach of human imagination.

Puppet a father's threat—her father threatened her, she was afraid, and obeyed him like a slave, a soulless person. *Servile to a shrewish tongue*—her mother rebuked her, and she obeyed her like a slave and married another.

Lines 45—62

To decline—to waste herself upon ; to condescend to marry. *On a range of.....than mine*—a man much inferior to him in nobili t and generosity of feeling, one who, therefore, would never be able to love her as he had loved her.

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Thou shalt lower.....day by day—everyday of her married life, she would decline gradually to the level of her husband.

What is fine within...with clay—she would grow coarse and unrefined like her gross and vulgar husband. *Clay*—gross and vulgar.

Mated—married. *Clown*—a gross and unrefined fool.

Will have weight.....down—she will be put down to his own level ; she will grow coarse and vulgar like him In his company, she is bound to be degraded.

Hold—value, regards. *Its novel force*—when they have been married for some time, and the novelty and freshness of first love are gone.

Something better...his horse—he would value her only a little more than his horse and dog.

What is this ?—the heated mind of the lover imagines a domestic scene in which Amy's vulgar husband returns home, drunk, and she has to wait upon him.

Think not they...with wine—like a dutiful wife, she must not even imagine that his eyes are heavy with drink.

My lord—ironical reference to the drunken husband. *Overwrought*—intoxicated, heated with wine.

Soothe him with...lighter thought—then Amy would be duty bound to soothe and comfort him. It would then be her duty to influence him with her own pure and graceful thoughts and thus bring about a change in him.

He will answer...to understand—the line is ironical. The drunken husband would rave incoherently, and talk senselessly. Amy would have to deal with such a husband. What a degradation !

Hidden from the heart's disgrace—It would have been better by far, if the lover had killed her with his own hands. It would have been better, if they both were dead. Then Amy would have escaped such shame and degradation.

Cursed be the social wants...forehead of the fool—in these lines Tennyson denounces the materialism of the age. Its false money-values, social snobbery, and social climbing all come in for his lash.

The social wants—the social necessity which forces one to marry against one's own inclination. Such forced marriages are a sin against the holy passion of love.

The social ties—the false conventions, values and ideals. *That warp us.. truth*—that distort our vision and make us blind to truth.

The sickly forms...Nature's rule—mercenary marriages, marriages dictated by considerations of rank and wealth violate the sacred law of nature that love is the only true and sound basis for marriage.

The gold that gilds...of the fool—the gold that gives an artificial superiority to fools of narrow intelligence. *Straitened forehead*—narrow intelligence. *That gilds*—makes golden, and so more attractive.

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Lines 63-82

Bluster—talk incoherently in this way ; talk uselessly at such length.

Would to God—he wishes that Amy had not proved so false and faithless.

Am I mad, that...bitter fruit—it is mere madness on his part to think constantly of Amy for her love had such bitter consequences for him.

I will pluck it...it the root—the lover thinks for a moment to root out Amy's love from his heart even though his heart itself is uprooted in the process. But would he get any comfort from forgetting Amy ? No, it will certainly not bring him any comfort, and, therefore, he will not do so. He will continue to cherish the memory of his love.

Never—he will uproot the memory of his love. *Though my mortal...come*—even though he enjoys such a long span of life as. *The many-winter'd crow*—the crow that has lived through many winters. *Clanging rookery*—the crows which crow as they fly homeward.

Where is comfort ?—how can one find comfort ? and then he proceeds to examine the various possible ways of comfort.

In division of the records of the mind—in separating the image of Amy he loved and who loved him, from Amy the girl as she was in herself, in reality.

Part her—separate her. *Kind*—loving and sympathetic to the lover.

I remember one that perished—he remembers the Amy who loved him, but who has since died to him.

Love is love for evermore—Amy never really loved him, for true love is fixed and constant like the Polar Star.

Comfort ?—says the lover scornfully why talk of comfort, for comfort is not possible in this world. *Comfort scorn of devils*—even the devil would scorn a comfort which results from forgetting the pleasant and happy past.

That a sorrow's crown of...things—it is the memory of happy experiences in the past which completes and crowns one's sorrow. There is no greater pain than to recall happy time in misery.

Drug thy memories—try to forget the past, as a drunkard forgets his worries.

Lest thou learn it—lest you should learn the truth that the greatest pain is to recall happy time in misery.

Lest thy heart be put to proof—lest your power of endurance be severely tested, by recalling the happy past.

Like a dog, he hunts in dreams—the lover imagines the deep

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anguish of Amy in dark, stormy nights, when her husband would be sleeping with pleasant dreams of hunting, and she would like awake staring at the blank walls of her room.

Then a hand...thee—then in her imagination she would see the hand of her lover, the speaker of the monologue, pass before her eyes and point to her drunken husband, sound sleep.

Widowed—as good as a widow (**Lobban**)

Lines 83-106

The 'Never, Never'—that you can never again enjoy the pleasure you knew in the past.

The phantom years—the years that are now no more.

And a song...thine years—the happy memories of your earlier love will haunt you like a sweet melody from the past.

And an eye shall...pain—In her wretchedness she would see the eyes of her lover bending upon her with tenderness and pity, with his earlier love, but the vision will wax her all the more.

Turn thee...rest again—she will find no comfort, whether she turns about restlessly on her pillow or whether she goes to sleep. Sleeping or waking she would be ever tortured by past memories.

Solace—consolation. *A tender voice will cry*—she will get a baby daughter and its cry would be a great consolation to her.

Purer—more innocent. *A lip to...dry*—the child would make her forget her own troubles.

Will laugh me down—will make me be forgotten; will mock and jeer at me.

My latest...rest—the lover regards the new born baby as his rival for the love of Amy. There is something vain and priggish about him.

Waxen—soft like wax. *Press me*—press away or remove.

Dearness—love. *Not his due*—which he does not deserve.

It will be worthy of the two—said ironically. The baby is part of its father and part of its mother, and so it must share the virtues and vices of both of them.

I see thee old and formal—the lover imagines Amy in her old age, grown conservative and orthodox, and repeating the role of her own mother.

Fitted to thy petty part—fitted to play the role of a conventional mother.

With a little hoard...heart—teaching her prudential maxims (which were also taught to her) and in this way trying to warn her against following the dictates of her heart.

Perish in thy self-contempt—it is better that one should die of

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disgust and self-scorn rather than live to teach such vulgar, commonplace maxims. Death is better than such moral degradation.

Overlive it—Amy would survive such degradation. *Lower yet*—she would suffer yet greater degradation. *Be happy*—she may even feel happy in her wretched life.

Mix with action—take part in some useful activity and in this way forget his misery. *Lest I wither in despair*—otherwise he would die of despair.

What is that which I should turn to ?—the lover now examines the various activities, like commerce, science, war, etc., in which he can engage himself and thus forget his frustration in love.

Lighting upon—happening to live in. *Days like these*—in such unfavourable times.

Every door.....golden keys—All profitable positions and occupations are in the hands of the rich, and are open only to the rich. In this way, does Tennyson condemn contemporary mammon worship.

Every gate.....suitors—there are too many applicants and too few jobs. *All the markets overflow*—all avenues of profitable employment are already over-crowded.

I have but an angry fancy—he can do nothing but rail against the materialism of the age.

Falling on the foeman's ground—dying in action, in the battlefield.

Ranks are rolled in vapour—the armies are enveloped by the smoke of cannon.

The winds are laid with sound—the noise of the winds is drowned by the roar of guns.

Jingling of the guineas—money in the pockets of the rich. *Helps the hurt that Honour feels*—the rich with the power which money gives them exploit the poor, but self-respecting people, like the present speaker, and thus add to their suffering and humiliation.

And the nations.....heels—the nations only blame each other and fight, without caring at all to improve the conditions of life.

Lines 107—130

Can I but relieve in sadness—has he no other prospects in life open to him except that of useless grief for what is no more ?

I will turn that earlier page—he will once again try to engage himself in the study of science and the pursuit of knowledge, as he did in the past.

Hide me from my deep emotion—help me to forget my deep grief. *Mother age*—the modern age, the mother of so many discoveries and inventions. The words are, of course, ironical.

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The wild enthusiasm—the enthusiasm for science and knowledge. *The strife*—the struggle and bustle of life.

When I heard my days before me—when in his imagination he could hear the hustle and activity of his life to come, a life useful and active. *The tumult of my life*—the excitement and activity of his future life, a life devoted to useful activity.

Eager-hearted—enthusiastic. *Nearer and nearer drawn*—approaching closer and closer to the city. *Heaven*—sky. *Flaring*—shining. *In among the throng of man*—to make one of the London crowds.

Earnest of the things—promise of greater achievement in the future.

Far I dipt into the future—he tried to visualise the distant future.

Saw the heavens fill with commerce—he imagined a time when the skys would be crowded with aeroplanes busy in trade. *Argosies*—merchant ships. *Argosies of magic sails*—wonderful ship which fly high in the sky.

Pilots of the purple twilight—aeroplanes moving about in the dim depths of the sky. *Costly bales*—rich merchandise.

Heard the heavens.....the central blue—but he could also hear in his imagination the sky full of the noise of war and visualise nations using aeroplanes for warfare and raining death and destruction on each other. *A ghastly dew*—bloods shed in war. *Airy navies*—aeroplanes. *Grappling in the central blue*—fighting in mid-sky.

Till the war drum.....the world—the speaker also visualised a time when wars would no longer be fought, when peace would rein on earth, and some kind of world organisation, like the League of Nations, the Federation of Mankind, the Parliament of Man, or the U.N.O., would be founded. The words are prophetic, for Tennyson's dream was realised after the World War I, when the League of Nations was founded to put an end to war. *The battle-flags were furled*—war was over, and so the flags of the warring nations had been folded.

The commonsense of most—the wisdom of the majority. *Hold a fretful realm in awe*—keep from fighting the passionate and easily irritated multitudes.

Lapt—wrapped up ; enfolded. *Universal law*—with one government for all the world.

Lines 131—150

So I triumphed—such were the happy dreams of the future which he had. He rejoiced in such dreams.

Ere my passion.....left me day—before he fell in love with Amy and his devouring passion for her robbed him of all life and activity.

Palsied—sick ; paralysed. *Jaundiced-eye*—a distorted vision, an eye which could no longer look at things in their correct perspective. His hopeful visions of the future were no more.

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Eye, to which all order festers—to his distorted vision even order looked like disorder, he saw evil even where none existed. *Festers*—decays. *Out of joint*—disordered.

Science moves, but.....creeping nigher—science, no doubt, progressed. But it resulted in the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few and the grinding poverty of the masses. The result was that they revolted, and like hungry lions marched forward in their destructive fury. It is a fine, vivid simile, describing the on rush of revolutionary forces.

One increasing purpose runs—the principle of gradual progress or evolution is the law of nature, a law which governs all life and activity.

With the process of the suns—with the passing of time.

What is that to him.....for ever like a boy ?—there might be the law of progress, this deep pulsation of progress, but it does not brighten in any way the life of a youngman frustrated in his love. *What is that to him*—this principle of progress is of no avail to him. *Reaps not*—is not successful in. *Beats*—throbs ; pulstates.

Knowledge comes but wisdom lingers—one of those lines of Tennyson that have become proverbial. Facts can be known easily, but the capacity to make right use of those facts is acquired slowly and with difficulty.

I linger on the shore—others have progressed and moved forward, but he has not acquired wisdom and made no progress. As a result of his frustration, he has stagnated like standing water.

Whithers—fades away and dies out. *The world is more and more*—The world may be better and better.

He bears a laden breast—Individuals like him, are always oppressed with the burden of sorrow and frustration. *Bear*—carry (to the grave). *Stillness of his rest*—his grave.

Target for their scorn—the object of their contemptuous laughter.

To harp on such a moulder'd string—to think again and again of such a worthless woman. *Moulder'd string*—something rotten and worthless.

Slight a thing—such a worthless person.

Weakness to be wrath with weakness—It would be weakness on his part to be angry with a woman, for a woman is much weaker than man.

Woman's pleasure woman's pain—a woman is easily pleased and made happy and she is as easily pained and made unhappy.

Blinder motions—guided by irrational impulses and not by reason and logic.

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Bounded in a shallower brain—they are less intelligent and broad-minded.

Lines 151—172

Woman is the lesser man—woman is far inferior to man. *Thy*—*i.e.* of Amy, a woman.

Are as moonlight...unto wine—is as weak as is moonlight in comparison with sunlight and water in comparison with wine.

Where nature sickens—where there are frequent storms, mists and fogs. *Nothing*—he can do nothing useful in such a country ; he can find no peace here.

Ah, for some retreat—in the lines which follow the speaker yearns for some secluded spot in the tropics, away from the haunts of civilisation, where he may lead a peaceful retired life.

Orient—the East. *Where my life began to beat*—where he was born, and where he passed his early boyhood.

Mahratta-battle—battle with the Mahrattas of India. *Evil-starr'd*—unlucky.

Trampled—oppressed. *Selfish uncle's ward*—his selfish unsympathetic uncle was his guardian, and it was to him that he came to Locksley Hall, and fell in love with Amy.

Or to burst all links of habit—he will like to break free from all bondage to tradition and custom and go to some far off secluded spot, away from the haunts of civilisation.

The gateway of the day—the east where the sun rises.

Larger constellations...paradise—the speaker visualises the tropical land where he would like to settle and live. *Larger constellations burning*—stars there would shine more brightly. *Mellow-moon*—the moon would be much fuller. *Breadths*—large expanses or large tracts of land shaded by. *Knots of Paradise*—heavenly flowers.

Never comes...flag—there is no trade and commerce in that primitive country, and the Europeans with their artificial civilisation have not reached there. Life is primitive and so happy and innocent.

Slides—flies. *Trailer*—the creeper. *The crag*—projecting rocks.

Droops the...power—branches are bowed down with the weight of flowers.

Summer isles of Eden...spheres of sea—in that imaginary island, his Eden, his paradise, it would be always summer, and life would go leisurely. This is the speaker's utopia, his Happy Isle, to which he would like to escape.

This march of mind—this progress of science. *Shake*—agitate, excite.

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Cramped no longer—no longer checked and restrained by convention and tradition ; free from all bonds of custom.

Shall have...space—love would live a happier and fuller life.

Take—Marry. *Dusky race*—dark children. *Iron-jointed*—having joints strong like iron. *Supple-sinewd*—having elastic muscles.

Lines 173—194

Fool, again the.....the fancy—the speaker realises his folly in giving way to such utopian dreams.

But I know...wild—but he is not a fool. He may give way to such wild dreams for a moment, but in his heart of hearts he knows that such fancies are useless.

Count—consider. *Grey*—old. *Lower*—lower in the scale of civilisation.

I, to herd with narrow foreheads—he would be never foolish enough to go and live with primitives with their undeveloped brains. *To herd with*—to associate with. *Vacant of our glorious gains*—who have no knowledge of the wonderful progress that science has made.

Mated with a squalid savage—he would never commit the folly of marrying a dirty, primitive woman.

What to me were sun or clime—even the most glorious sun or the most pleasant climate in such a primitive country can have no charm for him.

Held it better—always preferred.

Than that earth...in Ajalon—rather than that all progress should cease on earth, that the world should stand still, as did the Moon in the valley of Ajalon. According to the Biblical story, when Joshua had conquered the Amorites, he ordered the Moon to stand still in the valley of Ajalon.

Not in vain the distant beacons—the future calls them with promises of greater and more glorious progress.

Range—move ; wander.

Spin—travel fast. *The ringing grooves of change*—once when travelling by train, Tennyson imagined that the wheels of the train ran in a groove. Such was the origin of this famous line. Let the world move on swiftly from progress to progress.

The shadow of the globe—night ; the darkness of ignorance is meant.

Better fifty years...Cathay—the line expresses the speaker's (or Tennyson's) faith in science and civilisation *Cathay*—the old name of China, which to the speaker is a land of ignorance.

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For mine I knew not—his mother died when he was an infant. So he never knew her.

Rift the hills...weigh the sun—the wonderful inventions of the various sciences, physics, astronomy, mathematics, etc., are here referred to.

Crescent promise...hath not set—he has not lost hopes of future progress of mankind. His soul is still optimistic of more glorious days that lie ahead.

Ancient forms of...yet—his old faith in science and progress revives, and he feels inspired once again as in his youth.

Howsoever it may be—whatever may happen. *Now for me... roof-tree fall*—as far as he is concerned, he does not care in the least for the future fate of Locksley Hall.

Comes a vapour from the margin—he sees a cloud—the cloud of revolution—rise up from the horizon. *Blackening over*—casting its dark shadow over.

Cramming all the...a thunderbolt—bringing with it death and destruction.

For the mighty wind rises...and I go—the line puts one in mind of the close of *Ulysses*. Where does the speaker intend to go? Does he intend to go to war like the frustrated hero and lover in *Maud*? The end of the poem is vague and undefined.

———

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27

The Poet's Song

(*a*) THE POEM

The rain had fallen, the Poet arose,
He pass'd by the town and out of the street;
A light wind blew from the gates of the sun,
And waves of shadow went over the wheat,
And he sat him down in a lonely place,
And chanted a melody loud and sweet,
That made the wild-swan pause in her cloud,
And the lark drop down at his feet.
The swallow stopt as he hunted the bee,
The snake slipt under a spray,
The wild hawk stood with the down on his beak,
And stared, with his foot on the prey,
And the nightingale thought, 'I have sung many songs,
But never a one so gay,
For he sings of what the world will be
When the years have died away.'

(*b*) CRITICAL NOTES, COMMENTS, ETC.

Fowler comments on this sweet lyric as follows : "Shelley envies the skylark's joy in the present, because, 'Man looks before and after. And pines for what is not' ; but Tennyson finds the poet's song better than the nightingale's, because the poets can look forward to the widening of man's thoughts 'by the process of the sun' and the gladness of 'the golden year' that is yet to be." The poet's song is better because he sings of the future, when the years have died away. The lyric brings out Tennyson's high conception of his own calling.

From the gates of the sun—*i.e.* from the East. *That made the wild swan, etc.*—his song was so sweet that the various creatures of nature were attracted by it. *In her cloud*—flying high in the clouds.

Down—light, soft hair.

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Songs From The Princess

(*i*) SWEET AND LOW

(*a*) THE POEM

Sweet and low, sweet and low,
Wind of the western sea,
Low, low, breathe and blow,
Wind of the western sea!
Over the rolling waters go,
Come from the dying moon, and blow,
Blow him again to me;
While my little one, while my pretty one, sleeps.
Sleep and rest, sleep and rest,
Father will come to thee soon ;
Rest, rest, on mother's breast,
Father will come to thee soon ;
Father will come to his babe in the nest,
Silver sails all out of the west
Under the silver moon;
Sleep, my little one, sleep, my pretty one, sleep.

(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

The Context : The Substance

This sweet song is a lullaby occurring at the end of Canto II of *The Princess*. A sailor is out at sea, and the mother at home sings this lullaby to make their child sleep. She prays to the western wind to blow gently, and blow him, her husband and the father of her child, to her again. Let a favourable wind blow so that the father may be united with the child, and the husband with the wife. The child should sleep quietly and comfortably on the mother's breast. It should not worry about the father, for he would soon come to him, the 'silver sails' of his ship will soon bring him, "out of the west."

A Pure Lyric : a Criticism of Life

Tennyson is a poet of conjugal love and the simple virtues of the home, and this sweet lyric presents a vivid and moving picture

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of conjugal fidelity and parental affection. It is a 'pure lyric', characterised by simplicity, both in emotion and language, and unmixed with any thought and reflection. It sings as if by some natural magic of its own. Moreover, it is well-integrated with its context. It is an implied criticism of a life devoted entirely to intellectual pursuits, to the entire exclusion of the warmer human emotions, the kind of life which the princess Ida and her six hundred maidens have been leading. The song reminds them of the pleasures of married life and the strong ties of love and affection which bind together wife and husband, mother, father, and child.

(*ii*) THE SPLENDOR FALLS

(*a*) THE POEM

The splendor falls on castle walls
And snowy summits old in story;
The long light shakes across the lakes,
And the wild cataract leaps in glory.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O, hark, O hear! how thin and clear,
And thinner, clearer, farther going!
O, sweet and far from cliff and scar
The horns of Elfland faintly blowing!
Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying,
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O love, they die in yon rich sky,
They faint on hill or field or river;
Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
And grow for ever and for ever.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
And answer, echoes, answer, dying, dying, dying.

(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

The Source

The Splendor Falls is a beautiful song that occurs at the end of Canto III of *The Princess*. **Aaron Watson** tells us that the lyric, "was suggested by the blowing of a bugle when the poet was visiting the Lake of Killarney". The music and melody of the lyric, enhanced by the use of double rhymes, has been noticed by all readers of Tennyson.

The Context

As is the case with the other songs, this song also is closely connected with the main theme of the poem. Princess Ida founded

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the *Female Academy* to which no male was allowed entrance. She had been betrothed to a neighbouring Prince who loved her and longed for her. So he disguised himself as a lady and with two other similarly disguised friends entered the college. The Princess proposed one day to have a scientific expedition "to take the dip of a certain strata to the north", and she invited the disguised Prince and his friends to accompany her and her maidens. There, a rich velvet pavilion was erected and the ladies moved to and fro, triumphant with joy.

The Element of Contrast

In the evening they saw the bright light of the sun falling on the walls of the castle. *This spectacle of beauty reminded the heartless Ida and her maidens of another and of a more permanent kind of splendour.* It was the splendour of love, which Ida and her companions were neglecting. According to **Prof. Wallace**, this song, "dwells upon the contrast between the evanescent character of the echoes in the physical world and the permanent and ever-widening sympathies of human hearts—the notes of the bugle sound across the lake, and faint and die; those of human affection,

.....roll from soul to soul,
And grow for ever and for ever.

The wild stirring strain emphasises the vital truth that in all noble endeavour, man's energy is inspired and his arm strengthened by the recollection of those whom he loves." When the bugle sounds, the echo resounds through hills and dales. But the air does not retain the sound, it grows thinner and thinner every moment, till it dies out and is heard no more. But the response produced in the heart of the beloved is indelible and it lasts. There it is nursed and fed on thoughts and hopes, and watered with tears, till it transcends time and distance and becomes immortal.

Opinion of Critics

The song has been praised highly by one critic after another. **Stopford Brooke** calls this the noblest of the six songs of *the Princess*, and says : *"The greatest poetical beauty has been reached in the second verse where, by a magical employment of words, the whole of Elfland is created and with it all the romantic tales echo in the ear."* Speaking of this song, **Dawson** in his study of *the Princess* says, "the song is evidently one of married love and the growing echoes reverberate from generation to generation, from grandparent to parent and grandchild."

(c) CRITICAL NOTES, COMMENTS, EXPLANATIONS, ETC.

Stanza 1

Splendour—the bright red rays of the setting sun. *The splendour...walls*—the walls of the castle are bathed in the bright red

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light of the sun. *Old in story*—famous through old myths and legends. *Long light shakes across the lake*—the slanting rays of the sun appear to tremble as they fall on the rippling water of the lake.

Wild cataract—a violent waterfall. The waterfall possesses a wild beauty, which is still more increased in the red light.

Blow, bugle...dying—let the bugle be blown, but the echoes thus produced will disappear after a short while. The echoes will re-sound only for a short while.

Stanza 2

Hark—listen.

Thin and clear—as the sound is low in pitch, it is more distinct.

Scar—written also 'scaur', a bare rock beside a hill.

The horns of Elfland, faintly blowing—"from their peculiar character, faint, yet clear, derived from no visible source, and as transitory as unsubstantial echoes, not unnaturally, suggest the idea of fairy agency" (**Wallace**). Shrill and distinct echoes coming from distinct hills are like the sounds of the bugles blown in fairyland.

Purple glens—the glens (open spaces in forests) are purple, either due to the nature of the soil or due to the purple light of the sun.

Stanza 3

O love—O my beloved.

They—the echoes of the bugle notes.

Yon—distant.

Faint—grow weaker.

Our echoes—the responsive feelings of the heart, sympathetic vibrations caused by love.

Roll from soul to soul—strike a responsive chord in the heart of the beloved; love begets love.

Grow for ever and for ever—increase in intensity with the passage of time; swell every moment and are immortal.

Set the wild echoes flying—stir strong reverberations; produce ravishing echoes in the heart of true lovers.

(iii) TEARS, IDLE TEARS

(a) THE POEM

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy autumn-fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

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Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,
That brings our friends up from the underworld,
Sad as the last which reddens over one
That sinks with all we love below the verge;
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awaken'd birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

Dear as remember'd kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feign'd
On lips that are for others; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
O Death in Life, the days that are no more!

(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

The Source

Tears, Idle Tears is a song which occurs in the beginning of Canto IV of *the Princess*. After a day's hard work, the princess Ida asks one of her maidens to sing a song and she sings the present song. The mood of the lyric is one of wistful longing, and it harmonises well with the mood of the princess at the moment. It is a poignant lyric which goes directly to the heart of the readers. Its popularity has been a continuing one, and it is included in most anthologies of English lyrics.

Critical Summary

The poet does not exactly know the cause of the tears that gather up in his eyes. The immediate cause of his sadness is the sight of the ripe autumn fields whose richness and golden hues stand in contrast to the poet's present misery and his own regret for the past. They remind him of his own past happiness.

The memory of his past happiness is as fresh as the hope which is kindled at the sight of a ship on the eastern horizon, bringing our friends back to home and lit up by the early rays of the sun. But the very next moment the unreal nature of this hope produces a regret which is as poignant as that which one feels at the last glimpse of the ship carrying away one's dear friends.

Due to the passage of time, the memory of the past happiness becomes blurred and dim; just as for a dying person the sight of a window lit up by the beautiful morning light on a summer day becomes dim due to a failing vision and once favourite and spontaneous songs of birds, singing in the morning, assume an unfamiliar sound. This naturally causes a poignant sadness in the heart of the poet, and he is inclined to weep.

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The memory of past happiness in itself is as dear to the poet as the memory of the kisses enjoyed in the past and as sweet as those which we enjoy in our imagination, even though their actual enjoyment may be an impossibility owing to the death of the beloved or her marriage with another. It is as overpowering as the first moments of love; yet it fills the poet with a sense of intense sorrow because he cannot call it back. Without the happiness which the poet knew in the past, his life is no better than death; if the pleasure and joy for which this life is meant is absent, the life becomes dull and as good as death. It is life in death; the poet is living, but he suffers the pain of death. He weeps, even though his tears are futile.

The Note of Pathos

The lyric has been praised by one critic after another for its music and melody and for its tender pathos. **S. A. Brooke** commenting on the lyric writes, "*Tears, Idle Tears*', represents more nearly than any of the songs of Tennyson, but chiefly in the last verse, one phase at least of the passion of love between man and woman. It does not represent its enjoyment, but the wild regret of its continued existence in unfulfilment. The three verses which lead up to this intense climax with slow and soft approaches are drenched through and through, more than any other regretful song I know, more even than any of Shelley's songs, in the heavy dew of long and living sorrow for love just touched but unttained." And **Wallace** comments, "The melancholy that dominates this song is traced by the poet to some reminiscence of prenatal happiness. The yearnings of the human heart for some ideal that is known to exist but cannot be defined, and the consciousness of the hopeless character of the desire so far as this world is concerned, are commonly regarded as evidence of the divine origin and immortality of the soul. This is the main motif of Wordsworth's *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood.*"

(c) NOTES, COMMENTS, EXPLANATIONS, ETC.

Stanza 1

Idle—useless; fruitless.

I do not know what they mean—I do not exactly understand their significance.

Depth—Bottom.

Divine despair—a deep sorrow associated with the memory of some past, heavenly pleasure.

Rise in the heart and gather to the eyes—Sorrow fills the heart with such overwhelming intensity that it begins to overflow in the shape of tears.

Happy Autumn fields—'autumn' is the season when the corn is ripe and the harvest is ready. The richness of the ripe field is the

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fulfilment of the farmer's hopes and consequently a source of pleasure to him. But the poet is grieved to compare the farmer's ripe field with his heart, quite devoid of any happiness.

The days that are no more—the happiness that is gone, and can never return.

Stanza 2

Fresh—vivid, beautiful.

First beam—the first ray.

Glittering on—shining lightly.

Sail—ship.

Underworld—from below the horizon; "When a ship appears in the distance, only the upper part is visible due to the rotundity of the earth and then all its shape gradually emerges in view." Tennyson's knowledge of physical phenomena is flawless.

Last—the last ray

Reddens—makes red.

Sinks—gradually disappears in the distance, as if it has gone down into the sea.

With all we love—with our beloved friends.

Below the verge—below the horizon.

Stanza 3

Strange—unfamiliar.

Dark summer downs—To a dying person, whose vision is dimmed, the bright summer morning appears dark.

The earliest pipe—the early morning song.

Half awaken'd birds—In the morning the impulse to sing is so strong that the birds begin to sing before they are fully awake.

To dying ears—the melodious song of the birds makes a dying person sad, because he would soon die, and so would hear it no more.

Unto dying eyes—to the dim vision of a person on his deathbed.

The casement—the window of his room.

Slowly grows a glimmering square—gradually appears before him as a faint outline square in shape. The window does not look like a window, but it appears like an indistinct framework.

So sad as strange, the days that are no more—the past happiness looks strange and unfamiliar with the passing of time. The memory grows vague and dim.

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Stanza 4

Dear as remember'd kisses after death—the memory of past happiness is as soothing as the recollections of the kisses of the beloved who is now dead.

Sweet—pleasant.

Hopeless fancy feign'd on lips that are for others—"When we do not hope to get a certain pleasure we enjoy it in our imagination. Similarly, we imagine we are kissing a certain person who is married to another, and whom we cannot kiss in reality."

Deep—overpowering

First love—the moment when we fell in love for the first time.

Wild—maddening.

Death-in-life—life is no better than death, if the pleasure for which we live is denied and is beyond our reach. Then we experience the pain of death in life.

(*iv*) O SWALLOW, SWALLOW, FLYING SOUTH

(*a*) THE POEM

O Swallow, Swallow, flying, flying south,
Fly to her, and fall upon her gilded eaves,
And tell her, tell her, what I tell to thee.

O, tell her, Swallow, thou that knowest each,
That bright and fierce and fickle is the South,
And dark and true and tender is the North.

O, Swallow, Swallow, if I could follow, and light
Upon her lattice, I would pipe and trill,
And chirup and twitter twenty million loves.

O, were I thou that she might take me in,
And lay me on her bosom, and her heart
Would rock the snowy cradle till I died!

Why lingereth she to clothe her heart with love,
Delaying as the tender ash delays
To clothe herself, when all the woods are green?

O, tell her, Swallow, that my brood is flown,
Say to her, I do but wanton in the South,
But in the North long since my nest is made.

O, tell her, brief is life but love is long,
And brief the sun of summer in the North,
And brief the moon of beauty in the South.

O, Swallow, flying from the golden woods,
Fly to her, and pipe and woo her, and make her mine,
And tell her, tell her, that I follow thee.

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(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

The Context

This exquisite lyric occurs in *Canto IV* of *The Princess*. The princess Ida founds a *Female Academy* from which all Males are excluded. The Prince who loves her and is betrothed to her enters the *Academy*, along with a few friends, disguised as a girl from the North. Once the princess and her friends ask him to sing a song of his own land. The prince sings the present song which is an indirect expression of his love, and his impatience with Ida's schemes and isolation.

The Substance : Emotional Fervour

In the song, the lover asks the swallow to act as his messenger of love. The bird should go to her where she lives in the south. It should tell her that the north is, "dark and true and tender," while the south may be brighter but it is, "fierce and fickle". In this way, he asks the swallow to emphasise the difference between the love and constancy of the North (from where he comes) and the fickle, inconstant nature of the South, to which his beloved belongs.

Carried away by the ardour of his passion, the lover tells the swallow that if he could reach her window, he would pipe and trill, "twenty million loves". If she would take her in, he would lie on her soft, white bosom, rocked with its rise and and fall, till he dies. The following lines have a Keats-like sensuousness,

And lay me on her bosom and her heart
Would rock the snowy cradle till I died

and remind one of Keats' longing to, 'swoon to death', on his, "fair love's ripening breast."

The lover is impatient of the delay on the part of the beloved in coming to him. She delays as the tender ash delays, "*to clothe herself, when all the woods are green.*" Tennyson is known for his imagery, and the aptness, freshness, minuteness and precision of this image need no comment. The swallow is to tell her that her home in the north is ready to receive her, and she should come to him without further delay. Life is brief like, "the sun of summer in the north," and "the Moon of Beauty in the South", and she must not linger and delay. The swallow must fly to her swiftly, court her on his behalf, and tell her that her true love comes behind and would soon be with her.

Its Artistic Greatness

'*O Swallow, Swallow, Flying South*' is a perfect lyric in its intensity and fervour of emotion, in its simplicity and felicity of expression, in its imagery, and in its music and melody.

The Princess as a whole is little read to-day, but its lyrics, like the present one, continue to be as popular as ever.

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Gilded—golden. *Eaves*—over-hanging edges of a thatched roof; cornice.

Fierce—cruel. *Fickle*—inconstant in love. *The South*—the princess who belongs to the south. *True*—faithful. *Tender*—loving; affectionate. *The North*—the Prince who belongs to the North.

Lattice—window. *Twenty mil ion loves*—the expression bears witness to the ardour of the Prince's love.

The snowy cradle—her white bosom on which the prince would lie, if he were a bird.

Lingereth—delays. *To clothe her heart with love*—to give herself over to her lover.

Brood—the young ones of the swallow. *Wanton*—indulge in playful, love-making. *My nest*—the home which is to receive the Princess after marriage with him.

Moon of beauty—beautiful Moon.

Make her mine—by arousing love in her heart for me.

(*v*) ASK ME NO MORE

(*a*) THE POEM

Ask me no more : the moon may draw the sea ;
The cloud may stoop from heaven and take the shape,
With fold to fold, of mountain or of cape ;
But O too fond, when have I answer'd thee ?
Ask me no more.

Ask me no more : what answer should I give ?
I love not hollow cheek or faded eye :
Yet, O my friend, I will not have thee die !
Ask me no more, lest I should bid thee live ;
Ask me no more.

Ask me no more : thy fate and mine are seal'd ;
I strove against the stream and all in vain ;
Let the great river take me to the main.
No more, dear love, for at a touch I yield ;
Ask me no more.

(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

The Context

This beautiful song has been placed at the end of *Canto VI of The Princess* Princess Ida had founded the *Female Academy* and isolated herself and her companions from all masculine company. Men were not allowed in *the Academy*, but the Prince who loved Ida entered in disguised as a woman, with a few friends, and thus could stay in *the Academy* and be close to his beloved.

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The Inner Conflict

With the passing of time, the Princess realised the barrenness of a life devoid of the warmth of love and affection. Her companions, too, yearned for love, and the Princess realised that her plans were bound to fail. She herself longed for love, but still hesitated to yield to it. The song brings out the conflict within her between her longing for love, and her reluctance to yield to it. She would like to love, and be loved, but she still holds out against the inevitable, *i.e.* her surrender to her lover.

The Substance

The singer asks her lover not to press her further to give a reply to his question. The moon may influence the sea, and the clouds may be drawn down by mountains and take up their shapes, but she would never yield to the influence of love. She has never encouraged him, and it is folly on his part to go on waiting. She wants that she should not be pressed further, for she is afraid she may yield :

Ask me no more, lest I should bid thee love :
Ask me no more.

The refrain, "Ask me no more", emphasises the lack of self-confidence of the lady. Uptill now she has resisted the strong current of love, but she is afraid that if she would be pressed further, she would yield, and let, "the great river take me to the main". Therefore, she repeats, "ask me no more."

Its Art

The simplicity of its diction and language, its music and melody, its emotional intensity and fervour, all justify the popularity of this exquisite piece. More specially, **Mr. Wallace** emphasises Tennyson's artistic use of monosyllables which impart gravity and stateliness to the song.

The Moon may draw the sea—the sea is influenced by the Moon, which causes tides on it. *The clouds may.....or of cape*—the clouds are represented as being influenced by the mountains. They are pulled down, and assume mountain-like shapes.

Lest I should bid thee love—The Princess is already in love. If pressed further, she would yield and allow love to live in her heart.

Thy fate and mine are sealed—it is fated that they should love and be husband and wife. *The stream*—the current of love. *Let the great.....main*—let me be carried away by the river of love. *Main*—sea.

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(*vi*) NOW SLEEPS THE CRIMSON PETAL

(*a*) THE POEM

Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white ;
Nor waves the cypress in the palace walk ;
Nor winks the gold fin in the porphyry font.
The fire-fly wakens ; waken thou with me.

Now droops the milk-white peacock like a ghost,
And like a ghost she glimmers on to me.

Now lies the Earth all Danae to the stars,
And all thy heart lies open unto me.

Now slides the silent meteor on, and leaves
A shining furrow, as thy thoughts in me.

Now folds the lily all her sweetness up,
And slips into the bosom of the lake.
So fold thyself, my dearest, thou, and slip
Into my bosom and be lost in me.

(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

The Source

The sweet lyric occurs in Canto VII of *The Princess*. One night, the Prince awoke from a sound sleep, and found the Princess Ida, whom he loved, reading in low tones a song from, "A volume of the poets of her land". It was the present song which she was reading.

Substance

The lyric is an appeal to the beloved to surrender herself completely to her lover, and become one with him. Says **Wallace**, "It is a common device in songs, especially in love-songs, to enshrine a passionate purport in the midst of illustrative references to Nature, animate or inanimate. In the present case the lover makes his appeal by drawing attention to the subtle spiritual magnetism that exists between the restful earth and the palpitating sky. The Earth is influenced by the stars overhead, and so she must also be influenced by his love. Just as the meteor leaves a streak of light in the sky, so thoughts of his beloved have caused a furrow in his heart. In the end, the lover exhorts the beloved to fold herself in his bosom and be lost in him, just as the lily sinks into the bosom of the lake."

Form and Imagery

This lyric is an appeal to the beloved to surrender herself and join the lover. The unusual form of this lyric appears to be Tennyson's personal adaptation of the, "*ghazal*", a type of Persian

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love-ode, examples of which he had been reading in the original and in translation with the help of Fitz-Gerald. The imagery of roses, lilies, peacocks, stars and cypress is common to Persian poetry.

(c) CRITICAL NOTES, COMMENTS, ETC.

Now sleeps the crimson..... porphyry font. It is night, and all objects and creatures of nature are at rest. The poet invites the beloved to come to him, and have rest on his bosom.

Petal—i.e. flower. *The white*—the white flower. *Winks*—sparkles. *Fin*—fish.

Porphyry font—a small tank or cistern made of porphyry, an Egyptian stone of purple colour.

Waken thou with me—the lover wants that the beloved should wake when he awakes, even though all else may be sleeping. Just as the fire-fly keeps awake when all else in nature are asleep, so the poet is also awake and he wants his beloved to keep company with him.

Droops—sleeps, with his head bent low.

And like a ghost..... to me—the beloved is seen dimly by the poet at a distance. From a distance she looks unreal and unsubstantial like a ghost.

All Danae to the stars—wholly open to the influence of the stars. *Danae* was a Greek Princess, who was confined in an inaccessible tower for safety, but Zeus obtained admittance to her in the form of a shower of gold. Notice the appropriateness of the expression when used of the exposure of the earth to the influence of the golden stars.

Shining furrow—the streak of light left behind by a passing meteor. *Furrow*—a deep mark or line. *And slip.....in me*—the lover's call to the beloved is for total absorption in him. She should completely surrender herself to him.

(*vii*) COME DOWN, O MAID

(a) THE POEM

Come down, O maid, from yonder mountain height.
What pleasure lives in height (the shepherd sang),
In height and cold, the splendor of the hills ?
But cease to move so near the heavens, and cease
To glide a sunbeam by the blasted pine,
To sit a star upon the sparkling spire ;
And come, for Love is of the valley, come,
For Love is of the valley, come thou down
And find him ; by the happy threshold, he,
Or hand in hand with Plenty in the maize,

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Or red with spirted purple of the vats,
Or foxlike in the vine ; nor cares to walk
With Death and Morning on the Silver Horns,
Nor wilt thou snare him in the white ravine,
Nor find him dropt upon the firths of ice.
That huddling slant in furrow-cloven falls
To roll the torrent out of dusky doors.
But follow ; let the torrent dance thee down
To find him in the valley ; let the wild
Lean-headed eagles yelp alone, and leave
The monstrous ledges there to slope, and spill
Their thousand wreaths of dangling water-smoke,
That like a broken purpose waste in air.
So waste not thou, but come ; for all the vales
Await thee ; azure pillars of the hearth
Arise to thee ; the children call, and I
Thy shepherd pipe, and sweet is every sound,
Sweeter thy voice, but every sound is sweet ;
Myriads of rivulets hurrying thro' the lawn,
The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
And murmuring of innumerable bees.

(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

The Context

This exquisite lyric occurs in *Canto VII* of Tennyson's *The Princess, a Medley*, and it is closely integrated with its context. Late in the night, Princess Ida, unable to sleep, reads a volume of poems. First she sings to herself the song "*Now sleeps the crimson petal, and now the white*", and then the present one. She sings it to herself unaware of the fact that the Prince, who loves her, and who is sleeping nearby, is not really sleep but is watching her, and listening to her. Commenting on the song, **Percy Wallace** writes : "It is a common device in songs, especially in love-songs, to enshrine a passionate purport in the midst of illustrative references to Nature, animate or inanimate. In the present case the lover makes his appeal by drawing attention to the subtle spiritual magnetism that exists between the restful earth and the palpitating sky."

The Substance : Emotional Fervour

In this love-lyric, remarkable for its fervour and intensity, a shepherd lover asks his beloved to come down from the mountain peak where she stands to the valley below where he himself stands. On the mountain she might be nearer to heaven, but she is farther from the earth and from the pleasures of love. The mountain symbolises isolation and separation—a life barren and futile given to intellectual pursuits—while life in the valley represents a fruitful life full of love and happiness, a life guided by emotions, by the heart and

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not the head Princess Ida is very much moved by the song. She realises the barrenness of her own life, which is like a life lived on a mountain top. Her heart is touched and she decides to give up her ambitious plans which result in emotional sterility, and to surrender herself to her lover.

Artistic Greatness

'*Come Dow, O Maid*' is a consummate work of art in which every word has been carefully chosen both with reference to sense and sound. Concentration of vowel sounds, the use of alliteration as also that of liquid consonants '*l*', '*m*', and '*n*', as in the following, contribute to the music and melody of this sweet lyric :

The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
And murmuring of innumerable bees

Tennyson's sense of colour is seen in such expressions as, "azure pillars", "purple of the vats", "silver horns", "white ravine", etc. However. the greatest glory of the song is its abundant wealth of word-picture and imagery. The poet's imagination works at white heat and one exquisite image after another comes out of his pen, as do sparks from a chimney fire. In the following, the beloved on the mountain height is compared first to a sun-beam and then to a star :

But cease to move so near the heavens and cease
To glide a sun-beam by a blasted pine,
To sit a star upon the sparkling spire.

In the following, the abstract and the concrete mingle to give an image of rare felicity :

Their thousand wreaths of dangling water-smoke
That like a broken purpose waste in air

The vividness, and the almost classical perfection of the following is hard to match :

Let the torrent dance the down,
To find him in the valley.

Some Faults

Its felicity of diction and expression, its word-pictures, its imagery, and its music and melody all eombine to make it one of the most popular lyrics of Tennyson. The only fault that can be found with it is that there is too much of art in it. The expression of emotion is often clouded by the poet's fondness for nature-imagery ; Tennyson's art sometimes degenerates into artifice.

In height—on the mountain.

To glide a sun-beam—to move like a sun-beam.

Blasted pine— a pine that has been struck with lightning. The barrenness and desolation of a life cut off from the warmth of human

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emotions is thus brought out. *Spire*—the top of a tower ; here the high mountain peak.

Of the valley—it is in the valleys below that love lives. *He*—the lover. *With plenty in the maize*—in the fields where maize grows plentifully. *Spirted purple*—wine gushing out. *Vats*—casks of wine. *Hand in hand...vats*—the poet suggests that plenty of food and wine are necessary for the enjoyment of the pleasures of love. *Fox-like in the wine*—like a fox creeping into the vine yards and doing damage to the vine.

Silver Horns—montain tops. *Snare him*—catch him ; find him. *Whtie ravine*—mountain crags covered with snow. *Firth of ice*—rivers frozen with snow. *The firths of ice...dusky doors*—the allusion is to rivers with frozen surfaces flowing down slowly, till they reach the warmer temperature below and melt. *Dusky doors*—the outlet at the bottom is called dusky in contrast to the snows above.

Lean-headed eagles—eagles with their narrow heads. *Yelps*—cries with pain. *Monstrous ledges*—huge rocky projections.

Their thousands...water smoke—the reference is to the sheets of spray and wreaths of vapour formed as the torrents flow down. *Dangling*—hanging.

Azure pillars of the hearth—the smoke rising from the kitchen chimney at home. *Arise to you*—invite you to come home to your lover.

Immemorial—ancient.

———

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29

Tithonus

(*a*) THE POEM

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,
The vapors weep their burthen to the ground,
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,
And after many a summer dies the swan.
Me only cruel immortality
Consumes ; I wither slowly in thine arms,
Here at the quiet limit of the world,
A white-hair'd shadow roaming like a dream
The ever-silent spaces of the East,
Far-folded mists, and gleaming halls of morn.

Alas ! for this gray shadow, once a man—
So glorious in his beauty and thy choice,
Who madest him thy chosen, that he seem'd
To his great heart none other than a God !
I ask'd thee, "Give me immortality."
Then didst thou grant mine asking with a smile,
Like wealthy men who care not how they give.
But thy strong Hours indignant work'd their wills,
And beat me down and marr'd and wasted me,
And tho' they could not end me, left me maim'd

To dwell in presence of immortal youth,
Immortal age beside immortal youth,
And all I was in ashes. Can thy love,
Thy beauty, make amends, tho' even now,
Close over us, the silver star, thy guide,
Shines in those tremulous eyes that fill with tears
To hear me ? Let me go ; take back thy gift.
Why should a man desire in any way
To vary from the kindly race of men,
Or pass beyond the goal of ordinance

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Where all should pause, as is most meet for all ?
A soft air fans the cloud apart ; there comes
A glimpse of that dark world where I was born.
Once more the old mysterious glimmer steals
From thy pure brows, and from thy shoulders pure,
And bosom beating with a heart renew'd.
Thy cheek begins to redden thro' the gloom,
Thy sweet eyes brighten slowly close to mine,
Ere yet they blind the stars, and the wild team
Which love thee, yearning for thy yoke, arise,

And shake the darkness from their loosen'd manes,
And beat the twilight into flakes of fire.
Lo ! ever thus thou growest beautiful
In silence, then before thine answer given
Departest, and thy tears are on my cheek.
Why wilt thou ever scare me with thy tears,
And make me tremble lest a saying learnt,
In days far-off, on that dark earth, be true ?
"The Gods themselves cannot recall their gifts."
Ay me ! ay me ! with what another heart

In days far-off, and with what other eyes
I used to watch—if I be he that watch'd—
The lucid outline forming round thee ; saw
The dim curls kindle into sunny rings ;
Changed with thy mystic change, and felt my blood
Glow with the glow that slowly crimson'd all
Thy presence and thy portals, while I lay,
Mouth, forehead, eyelids, growing dewy-warm
With kisses balmier than half-opening buds
Of April, and could hear the lips that kiss'd

Whispering I knew not what of wild and sweet,
Like that strange song I heard Apollo sing,
While Ilion like a mist rose into towers.
Yet hold me not for ever in thine East ;
How can my nature longer mix with thine ?
Coldly thy rosy shadows bathe me, cold
Are all thy lights, and cold my wrinkled feet
Upon thy glimmering thresholds, when the steam
Floats up from those dim fields about the homes
Of happy men that have the power to die,

And grassy barrows of the happier dead.
Release me, and restore me to the ground,
Thou seest all things, thou wilt see my grave ;
Thou wilt renew thy beauty morn by morn,
I earth in earth forget these empty courts.
And thee returning on thy silver wheels.

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(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION— CRITICAL SUMMARY

Its Publication and Source

Tithonus though written in 1833, was not published till 1860, presumably because its mood and outlook were not in harmony with the more boyant and optimistic outlook of the poems in the 1842 volume. Like *Ulysses* it is a dramatic monologue on a classical subject. It is based on the classical myth of the love of Goddess Aurora for Tithonus. Its story is told in the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite.* Tithonus, according to the myth, was beloved by Aurora, the goddess of the Dawn, who, at his request, made him immortal. Since, however, he had omitted to ask for the perpetuation of his youth and beauty, he grew ever more and more old and decrepit, till, life becoming insupportable, he prayed Aurora to "take back her gift." As he could not die, the goddess changed him into a grass-hopper. "The poem takes high rank in the quasi-dramatic division of Tennyson's poetry, though it does not attempt to depict so much the characteristics of the individual as the special circumstances in which he is placed." *Tithonus* is one of the poet's most highly finished productions, and is remarkable for its purity of tone, its musical rhythm, and its simple beauty of style.

The Story : The Elegiac Note

The tone of the poem is elegiac. Arthur Hallam is already dead, and his death has cast the dark shadow of grief on the poet's soul, and it is the grief within him that inspires the tragic tone of the poem. Tithonus has grown old, "a White-haired ghost roaming like a dream" He does no longer have his previous glory, he is a mere shadow of his former self, while Aurora still continues to be young and beautiful. Pathetically, he exclaims that he is, "Immortal age besides immortal youth," and this companionship cannot endure for any length of time. He no longer feels the youthful sensation which Aurora's youth and beauty inspired in him earlier ; his blood does no longer glow with passion at the sight of her beautiful cheeks and shoulders. Therefore, he asks the goddess to take back the gift of immortality she has granted to him, and put him back on earth, so that he too may die like other 'happy man' there. To Tithonus, broken and decrepit with age, men in their mortality appear to be happy for they can shake off their worn out physical selves, and thus renew their youth and vigour, while he himself is condemned to eternal immortality and so also to eternal old age and weak and shadowy existence.

The Moral

At his lament Aurora weeps, and Tithonus at once realises that "Gods themselves cannot recall their gifts" Even if she wishes to restore him to his happy human condition, she cannot do so. Her

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tears frighten him for they remind him of her helplessness and his own eternal suffering as an old man. The poem teaches us the truth that man should not desire to, "vary from the kindly race of men", nor seek to, "pass beyond the goal of ordnance." The poet does not rail cynically at human life, nor does he condemn it as worthless, as a mere, "orchestra of victim shriek and pain," rather he is aware of the good and beauty in life, of, 'the kindly race of man,' and all the pleasures that lie open to him in this world. But he wants that the limitations of human life should be accepted, for any desire to circumvent them is likely to result in divine punishment as in the case of Tithonus. Thus the poem is neither an expression of a death-wish, nor a condemnation of life, nor is it a poem of escape, but a powerful plea for an acceptance of life with all its beauty and glory, as well as with all its limitations. Death is not to be shunned as something evil, but to be welcomed as the means through which life renews itself.

As a Work of Art

Tithonus is a highly wrought work of art. Says **J.B. Steane,** "The poem is one of the most beautiful Tennyson ever wrote. What does seem significant and characteristic is that the best poetry should again be drawn from him by just such a subject. For Tithonus, though existing in perfect stillness, remote, as the lotos eaters, from the turmoil of ordinary life, has no will, no energy. His condition makes it possible for the poet to recapture that Keatsian mood, 'half in love with easeful death', which had inspired him to write his best poetry in *Mariana*. He never wrote better than in the first lines of Tithonus :

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,
The vapors weep their burthen to the ground,
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,
And after many a summer dies the swan.

Sound and image combine to enforce sense : to represent age and the sorrows of age, natural law and the beneficence of it. The heavy, regular beat of,

Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,

Emphasises the kindly security that the natural rhythm of existence brings to the normal man. **Aldous Huxley** asks what the swan is doing in the picture and calls it a, 'luminous irrelevance'. **F.L. Lucas** has answered him saying that it is not : it is a symbol of age, and its whiteness, too, reflects the 'white-hair'd shadow' that the old man now is, sitting,

Here at the quiet limit of the world.

In either case, as **Huxley** says, 'Tennyson knew his magician's business.'

Imagery : Word-pictures

It has been said that Tennyson's poetry lives by virtue of his imagery, and the poem amply illustrates the truth of this statement.

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Sensuous word-pictures, vivid and graphic, abound in the poem. For example, there are the two pictures depicting the rise of dawn and the gradual brightening of the eastern horizon. We get a touch of Keats-like voluptuousness when the poet speaks of Aurora's pure brows, bare shoulders and bosoms, her crimson cheeks, her dark eyes and her kisses, "Balmier than half-opened buds of April." His eye for colour is seen in lines like the following ;

And shake the darkness from their loosened manes,
And beat the twilight into flakes of fire.

Language and Diction

The poem is also remarkable for its felicity of expression, and provides numerous examples of Tennyson's capacity to chisel, "jewels five words long" Expressions, like the following, have become current coins :

1. *A white-haired shadow roaming like a dream*
2. *Immortal age, besides immortal youth.*
3. *Kindly race of men*
4. *Kisses balmier than half-opened buds.*
5. *Happy men that have the power to die.*

Conclusion

The poem, in short, "*is perhaps the most perfect specimen of poetic workmanship in all Tennyson.*" It does not give us a striking sketch of character like *Ulysses* ; rather it is a study of an emotion and its circumstances, and as such it remains unsurpassed in Tennyson's gallery of exquisite lyrics.

(*c*) NOTES, EXPLANATIONS, COMMENTS, ETC.

Lines 1—10. Substance

Death is the law of nature He, Tithonus, alone does not die. He moves about like a white-haired ghost among strangers. He longs for death.

The wood, decay.....fall—everything in nature decays and dies. The key-note of the poem is thus struck in the very first line.

Vapor—clouds and mists. *Their burden*—their burden of moisture. *Weep*—let fall in the form of rain and dew.

Lies beneath—dies and is buried.

And after many.....swan—the swan enjoys a much longer life than man, but even he dies.

He only.....consumes—Tithonus is the only unfortunate creature who suffers acutely owing to his gift of immortality. *Cruel*—because it causes him acute pain.

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Wither—am consumed or eaten away. *Thine arms*—the arms of goddess Aurora who loved him.

Quiet limit of the world—the eastern horizon, the home of the goddess Aurora.

A white-haired.....like a dream—wandering about, "like a shadow or even a dream" (**Row & Webb**). He has grown unsubstantial and unreal like a dream or a shadow, and he is white-haired with age.

The ever-silent.....East—the Eastern regions which are calm and still at early dawn.

Far-folded mists—mists in the far off eastern sky. *Gleaming Halls of morn*—the eastern sky bright at day dawn.

Lines 11—31 : Substance

Tithonus regrets that he demanded from Aurora the gift of immortality. With the passing of time he has grown old and worn out, and so no longer desires to live. He, therefore, desires that Aurora should take away her gift, so that he, too, may die like other human beings.

The gray shadow—Tithonus himself grown old and unsubstantial, a mere shadow of man.

Thy choice—in the fact that you, goddess Aurora, chose him as your lover. *Thy chosen*—your lover.

Great heart—heart filled with ambition, or with a sense of his own importance.

Mine asking—my request.

Thy strong Hours—all-conquering time. In Greek mythology the Hours were three sisters, daughter of Zeus and Themis. Here they are represented as attendants waiting on the goddess Aurora.

Indignant—angry, that anybody should try to escape the ravages of time. *Worked their wills*—Had their way with him ; with the passing of time he lost his strength and youth.

Beat me down...wasted me—Exhausted him, and crushed and destroyed his youth and beauty. *Could not end me*—could not put an end to his life. *Maimed*—impaired ; disfigured.

To dwell in presence...immortal youth—Tithonus contrasts his own old age with the immortal beauty and youth of the goddess Aurora. He has immortal old age, while she has immortal youth.

And all I was in ashes—all his beauty, all his glory, has been ruined.

Make amends—compensate him for the loss of his own youth and glory, and his consequent suffering. *Close over us*—quite near us. *The silver star, thy guide*—the bright star Venus, or the morning star, which heralds the coming of dawn.

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Shines in those...to hear me—the light of the morning star shows that Aurora's eyes are filled with tears to listen to the pathetic words of Tithonus. But she cannot help him in any way.

To vary from—to be different from. *Kindly*—of the same kind or nature as he himself. *Pass beyond*—transcend ; overcome. *The goal of ordnance*—the ordained goal or limit of human existence.

Where all should pause—the destined limit of life, when all should die. *As is most meet for all*—it is right and proper that all should live the destined length of their life. None should try to live beyond that limit.

Lines 32—45 : Substance

This passage describes the gradual appearance of the dawn. First, through a break in the cloud, Tithonus sees a glimpse of the earth. Then the veil of weird, glimmering twilight is withdrawn, and the dawn, pure and fresh, begins to reveal itself. Soon the eastern horizon grows red and bright, though still the stars are visible, till at last the dawn appears and day is begun.

Fans the cloud about—blows away the cloud. *That dark world... born*—the earth where Tithonus was born. At the time he is living in the sky with Aurora

Steel from—radiates from ; spreads from. *With a heart renewed* —with a renewed vigour, because she was once more appearing in the eastern sky in all her glory.

They blind the stars—The stars grow dim with the appearance of Aurora. *Blind*—obscure ; make dim ; extinguish.

Wild dream—the horses which drew the chariot of Aurora. Aurora was represented as driving a rose-coloured chariot drawn by white horses, and she set out before the chariot of the sun as dawn precedes sun-rise.

Yearning for thy yoke—the horses love her, and so are eager to serve her.

Loosened manes—long flowing hair on the neck of horses. *Beat the twilight...of fire*—darkness is beaten out and bright crimson light of dawn spreads over the eastern sky.

Ever—at each day break. *Before thy answer given*—before giving thine answer.

Lines 46—63 : Substance

Tithonus is afraid that Aurora does not have the power to take away the gift of immortality that she had bestowed upon him. He recalls with what different feelings and looks he used to observe the

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appearance of dawn every day. Now all his former feelings have gone, and only a lasting sense of desolation remains.

The last lines of the passage again give a highly sensuous description of the coming of dawn.

Scare—frighten. He fears that Aurora has no power to take away her gift of immortality granted to him.

Saying—a common proverb.

Ay me...me—alas! *With what other feelings*—with what different feelings and looks.

If I be that watched—Tithonus feels so different now that he can hardly believe that he is the same person. He can no longer experience the passion of youth which he experienced earlier.

The lucid...thee—Your shadowy figure becoming bright and well-defined.

The dim curls...rings—your dark hair *i.e.* the clouds in the eastern sky becoming bright.

Mystic change—the strange, mysterious change that came over the goddess. *Thy portals*—the eastern sky. *Balmier*—more smoothing ; softer.

Whispering...and sweet—whispering to me strange and delightful words which he could not understand.

Like that strange song...into towers—Tithonus, being the son of Laomedon, King of Troy, may be supposed to have been present when Neptune and Apollo, who had been condemned by Zeus to serve Laomedon for one year, built the walls of Troy or Ilion. Classical myths say that the stones of the wall were charmed into their places by the sweet sound of Apollo's lute.

Lines 64—76. Substance

Tithonus is old while Aurora is young. So there can be no sympathy between them ; they cannot live together any longer. So he exhorts Aurora to let him return to earth, where like other happy men, he would also die and be buried in his grave.

Hold me not—do not compel me to live. *How can mine..... thine* ?—Since you are young and I am old, the old sympathy between us cannot endure much longer.

Coldly thy rosy...cold—Tithonus no longer feels the youthful passions which her beauty excited in him in the past. He now remains cold to her beauty. *Thy glimmering threshold*—the eastern sky bright with day dawn.

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Steam floats up—vapours arise. *Of happy man...to die*—the line vividly brings out Tithonus' yearning for death.

Barrows—graves. *Release me and...ground*—free me from your gift of immortality and let me return to earth to die there like other mortals.

Thou wilt renew...worn—you will appear in the eastern sky in all your splendour every morning.

I earth in earth—he himself would become dust in his grave.

Empty courts—the court of the goddess Aurora *i.e.* the eastern sky.

The silver wheels—in your bright chariot. The chariot of Aurora is *Silver* while that of the Sun is *Golden*. *Returning*—continuing ; repeating every morning.

———

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30

Mariana

(*a*) THE POEM

"Mariana in the moated grange."
Measure for Measure.

With blackest moss the flower-plots
Were thickly crusted, one and all;
The rusted nails fell from the knots
That held the pear to the gable-wall.
The broken sheds look'd sad and strange:
Unlifted was the clinking latch;
Weeded and worn the ancient thatch
Upon the lonely moated grange.
She only said, "My life is dreary,
He cometh not," she said;
She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!"

Her tears fell with the dews at even;
Her tears fell ere the dews were dried;
She could not look on the sweet heaven,
Either at morn or eventide.
After the flitting of the bats,
When thickest dark did trance the sky,
She drew her casement-curtain by,
And glanced athwart the glooming flats.
She only said, "The night is dreary,
He cometh not," she said;
She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!"

Upon the middle of the night,
Waking she heard the night-fowl crow;
The cock sung out an hour ere light;
From the dark fen the oxen's low
Came to her; without hope of change,

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In sleep she seem'd to walk forlorn,
Till cold winds woke the gray-eyed morn
About the lonely moated grange.
She only said. "The day is dreary,
He cometh not," she said;
She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!"

About a stone-cast from the wall
A sluice with blacken'd waters slept,
And o'er it many, round and small,
The cluster'd marish-mosses crept.
Hard by a poplar shook alway,
All silver-green with gnarled bark:
For leagues no other tree did mark
The level waste, the rounding gray.
She only said, "My life is dreary,
He cometh not," she said;
She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!"

And ever when the moon was low,
And the shrill winds were up and away,
In the white curtain, to and fro,
She saw the gusty shadow sway.
But when the moon was very low,
And wild winds bound within their cell,
The shadow of the poplar fell
Upon her bed, across her brow.
She only said, "The night is dreary,
He cometh not," she said;
She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!"

All day within the dreamy house,
The doors upon their hinges creak'd:
The blue fly sung in the pane; the mouse
Behind the mouldering wainscot shriek'd,
Or from the crevice peer'd about
Old faces glimmer'd thro' the doors,
Old footsteps trod the upper floors,
Old voices called her from without.
She only said, "My life is dreary,
He cometh not," she said;
She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!"

The sparrow's chirrup on the roof,
The slow clock ticking, and the sound
Which to the wooing wind aloof
The poplar made, did all confound

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Her sense; but most she loathed the hour
When the thick-moted sunbeam lay
Athwart the chambers, and the day
Was sloping toward his western bower. 80
Then, said she, "I am very dreary,
He will not come," she said;
She wept, "I am aweary, aweary,
Oh God, that I were dead!"

(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

Its Publication and Source

'*Mariana*', a lovely lyric in seven stanzas, was written when Tennyson was only twenty-one years of age, and was published in the volume of *Poems, Chiefly lyrical, 1930*. '*Mariana*' is the very jewel of this volume, the best of his early work representing the advent of a poet of genius. According to **Lionel Stevenson**, the hint for the poem might have come from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* where we get the phrase, "Mariana in the moated grange" or he might have got the hint from Keats' *Isabella*, but according to **John Pettigrew**, *Mariana* would never have been written without Keats' *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* with its lonely figure, "alone and palely loitering", in a barren autumn landscape, symbolising and intensifying the despair of that figure." However, *Mariana* is not a mere imitation of Keats. It is transmutation rather than imitation, a fine example of a genius modifying what he gets from others. Tennyson has taken a comparatively minor feature of Keat's poem, its desolate landscape, as appropriate setting for woe, and made it his poem's central feature. *Mariana* shows the influence of Keats, and anticipates the magical poems of Walter De La Mare and the waste lands of T.S. Eliot.

The Inner Landscape : Objective Co-relative

Mariana is the finest example in all Tennyson of inner landscape painting. In this exquisite poem Tennyson has done something new and fresh ; he has not only enriched English literature but also extended its possibilities. Music, melancholy, and landscape, all blend and fuse to bring out the despair and hopelessness of Mariana. From the very opening lines suggestive details are piled up, so that the setting in which Mariana lives and moves becomes a perfect symbol of her soul. Writes **John Pettigrew** in this connection, "I know of no earlier English poem relying so heavily on setting to reveal, or rather to create, a character's soul. In its indirect capturing of spiritual plight through imagery of physical blight, the poem's basic technique is precisely that of, say, the opening of *Prufrock* and '*The Fire Sermon*' ; and it is this, more than the metrics, which Mr. Eliot distinguished, that is 'wholly new'. Images of gloom and desolation permeate *Mariana* : the broken sheds look, 'sad and

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strange', the only waters are blackened and seemingly threatened by creeping moss, even the lone tree in the landscape becomes mysteriously sinister. The poem looks forward to the symbolic landscapes of Lotosland, *In Memoriam*, and *Idylls of the King*—and to the symbolists. 'The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art', remarked **Mr. Eliot** in his celebrated dictum, 'is by finding an "Objective correlative" ; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion ; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.' '*Mariana*' is a classic example of such an, "objective co-relative".

Aural and Visual Imagery

'Mariana' is full of sounds which, like the details of setting, are real and ordinary but in this context disturbing : a mouse seems to shriek, and even a sparrow's chirrup heightens nervous tension. Diction is also carefully controlled, for its sounds, sometime ugly as in the first stanza with its sibilants, hard '*k*' s and closing assonance, sometimes stretching out time, as in the extensive use of the lingering long '*o*' '*ou*' and '*oo*' sounds (which occur fifteen times in the last eight-lined stanza alone). The aural imagery is, however, less vital than the visual imagery, which not only pictures a real grange and landscape, but, much more important, symbolizes Mariana's state of mind.

Versification : Mariana's Plight

Everything in the poem, even its music, works towards a vivid presentation of Mariana's terrible hopelessness and listless despair. We learn of her sleeplessness and tears, and of their source in her lover's betrayal, though the very vagueness of the potential narrative background helps to measure the impossibility of release. Mariana knows, as we come to know, that her former lover will never come, that she must go on existing without hope of change. But there is utter absence of any passionate outcry against a fate so overwhelming that it cannot be fought against even in words. "Her suffering and weariness find only partial expression in the four-line refrain, which with its flaccid monotony of diction and rhythm, and its dying falls '*dreary*' and '*aweary*' intensifies the impression of unchanging enervation of spirit, its dulling, hypnotic repetition being varied only in the final stanza so that the lyric may end—or rather peter out—in a whimper of futility". And not only in the refrain but elsewhere also is masterly composer at work. For example, **Mr. Eliot** commented brilliantly on the sixth stanza's music, noting that, "*The blue fly sung in the pane*' would be ruined by the substitution of '*sang*' for '*sung*'. The horrible ironic '*sung*' gain further emphasis from occurring in one of the comparatively few examples of trochaic variations from rhythms and a verse from

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which are so extremely regular as to be virtually rigid and mechanical, all vitality as drained from them as from Mariana. "The deviations from taut and nervous rhythms are meaningful, as in the fifth stanza where sudden movement is stressed by the poem's one quickly moving line, '*And the shrill winds were up and away*', only for the suggestion of release to be stilled, almost mocked, by the torpor of the next few lines and the sluggish refrain".

Conclusion

In short in *Mariana*, it is the desolate landscape which is the central feature, and not the character of Mariana as such. Character, as a matter of fact, is lost in landscape and music, as the elegiac mood wells up from music of words rather than from their meaning, as from the visual images presented in close succession. *Mariana* is a study in mood and scene, "and that is why no actual story is told in the poem to account for Mariana's loneliness, or to explain who '*he*' was, and why '*he*' did not come. The poet is more concerned with the evocation of a dreamy, half-supernatural atmosphere, rather than with the telling of a story. It is something new that Tennyson has done in English verse, and he has done it with consummate art.

(c) EXPLANATORY AND CRITICAL NOTES

Stanza 1

Crusted—coated. *Latch*—a light door-lock opened from without. *Unlifted was...latch*—nobody now opened the door and entered in. *Weeded*—grown over by weeds. *Grange*—a farm house. *Moated*—having a moat or ditch round it.

Stanza 2

Even—evening. *Ere the...dried*—early in the morning before the sun had risen and dried the dew. *Her tears fell...were dried*—Mariana wept all night. *Eventide*—evening. *Did trance the sky*—spread over the sky. *Glooming*—shining through the dark.

Stanza 3

Night fowl—the owl. *Fen*—low marshy land. *Low*—lowing. *Forlorn*—forsaken ; lonely.

Stanza 4

About a stone-cost—at a stone's throw ; quite near to. *Sluice*—a structure with a gate for regulating flow of water. *Marish-mosses*—mosses that grow in marshes. *Gnarled*—rotten. *The level waste*—the waste land. *The rounding grey*—the surrounding grey fields. 'Grey' is a symbol of desolation.

Stanza 5

Were up and away—were blowing. *Shrill winds*—winds blowing with a shrill sound. *The gusty shadows sway*—the curtains were

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moved this way and that way by the gusts of winds, and moving shadows were formed. *And wild winds.....cell*—when it was calm and no winds were blowing.

Stanza 6

The dreamy house—the house of Mariana which seemed to sleep, so calm and quiet it was. There was no bustle and activity of life. *In the pane*—at the window. *Mouldering*—decaying. *Wainscot*—wood-work on the wall. *Old faces glimmer'd.....from without*—Mariana had hallucinations. She seemed to see old faces, and hear old voices calling her from outside.

Stanza 7

Which to the.....made—the sound which was made by the wind passing through the poplar. *Did all.....sense*—baffled and frightened. *The thick-moted sunbeam*—the slanting ray of the setting sun. *The day was..., bower*—the sun was about to set in the west.

———

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University Questions *with* Hints for Answers

1. 'Tears Idle Tears' : Sentiments expressed by the poet

This poignant lyric expresses the wistful longing of the poet for a vanished past of happiness and love. According to **S.A. Brooke**, "this exiquisite lyric is drenched in the heavy dew of long and living sorrow for love just touched but unattained." According to **Wallace**, "the main motif for the lyric is provided by the human longing for the divine, for some ideal which is unattainable."

The poet's sentiments have been conveyed by the use of suitable imagery. The memory of his past happiness is as fresh as the hope which is kindled at the sight of a ship on the eastern horizon, bringing our friends back to home and lit up by the early rays of the sun. But the very next moment the unreal nature of this hope produces a regret which is as poignant as that which one feels at the last glimpse of the ship carrying away one's dear friends.

Due to the passage of time, the memory of the past happiness becomes blurred and dim ; just as for a dying person the sight of a window lit up by the beautiful morning light on a summer day becomes dim due to a failing vision and once favourite and spontaneous songs of birds, singing in the morning, assume an unfamiliar sound. This naturally causes a poignant sadness in the heart of the poet, and he is inclined to weep.

The memory of past happiness in itself is as dear to the poet as the memory of the kisses enjoyed in the past and as sweet as those which we enjoy in our imagination, even though their actual enjoyment may be an impossibility owing to the death of the beloved or her marriage with another. It is as overpowering as the first moments of love ; yet it fills the poet with a sense of intense sorrow because he cannot call it back. Without the happiness which the poet knew in the past, his life is not better than

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death ; without the pleasure and joy for which this life is meant, life becomes dull and as good as death. It is life in death ; the poet is living, but he suffers the pain of death. He weeps, even though his tears are futile.

2. "The Splendour Falls" : Sentiments in the lyric

This exquisite lyric expresses the poet's yearning for love and the pleasures which love brings. According to **Prof. Wallace**, this song, "dwells upon the contrast between the evanescent character of the echoes in the physical world and the permanent and ever widening sympathies of human hearts—the notes of the bugle sound across the lake, and faint and die ; those of human affection,

...roll from soul to soul
And grow for ever and for ever.

"The wild stirring strain emphasises the vital truth that in all noble endeavour, man's energy is inspired and his arm strengthened by the recollection of those whom he loves." When the bugle sounds, the echo-resounds through hills and dales. But the air does not retain the sound, it grows thinner and thinner every moment, till it dies out and is heard no more. But the response produced in the heart of the beloved is indelible and it lasts. There it is nursed and fed on thoughts and hopes, and watered with tears, till it transcends time and distance and becomes immortal. Thus the lyric expresses the immortality of love, and the poet's passionate longing for it.

3. "Mort D'Arthur" : Significance of the poem

Or

Conflict in the poem : Victorian and modern

Tennyson's '*Mort D'Arthur*' narrates a medieval story, but it has far-reaching psychological and allegorical significance. It tells us that obedience and discipline are necessary, if the social fabric is to be maintained intact, that war and disorder result if there is unfaithfulness, treachery or disobedience. However, such social change should not cause despair, for change is the law of nature. "Old order" always changes giving place to the new.

The setting of the story is medieval, and the medieval atmosphere has been created with great art and skill. Reference to the Knights of the Round Table, and to tournaments in which Arthur fought lance in hand, bring out the chivalry and heroism of the middle ages. The supernaturalism and mystery of those remote ages, their belief in magic and witchcraft, is seen in the magic sword of King Arthur, and the mystic hand which rises out of the lake at his death to take it away. As **J.B. Steane** points

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out in the poem we have, "all the medieval wardrobe and scenery ; the armed heels, the 'white samite, mystic, wonderful', the brand Excalibur, etc."

But all this medieval paraphernalia constitutes only the background ; the drama which is enacted against this background is essentially Victorian and modern. The modern element in the poem is seen in the mental conflict that goes on within the mind of Sir Bedivere. He is torn within between his loyalty to his King and his desire to keep back the magnificent and precious sword. It is only after a prolonged struggle that he is able to overcome the temptation.

The modern element in the poem is also seen in the symbolic and allegorical significance which he has imparted to the story. As one critic points out, King Arthur represents. "the soul at war with the senses." "King Arthur stands for the God like man, as a kind of dream or hope of what manhood might attain, should it reach its ideal. He expresses the aspiration of the spirit toward perfection in our modern life. He symbolises the struggle of man towards a higher life." The mystic Lady of the Lake represents the Church or religion and Excalibur represents spiritual power with which Arthur wages war against Evil. The poem illustrates the truth that change is the law of nature, for without change even good customs corrupt the world. Change is necessary for progress, for orderly evolution. The purity of the family is also necessary for human growth and progress. When there is sin and corruption in the family, discord shakes the social fabric and death and destruction are the result Thus the illicit love of Gunivere and Lancelot and the treachery of Modred result in the dissolution of the society of the Knights of the Round Table and the death of Arthur.

According to **W. Bagehot**, the poem presents the contrast and conflict between two types of characters, the sensuous and the ascetic, and this conflict is universal ; it is as much modern and Victorian as it is medievel. He writes, "The contrast of character between King Arthur and Sir Lancelot is one of those which exists in some degree in all ages, but which the existing circumstances of an unsettled time necessarily tend to bring out and exaggerate. There is a presentation of two kinds of goodness which have long been contrasted, and always seem likely to be contrasted, in the world, the ascetic and the sensuous. The characteristic of the latter is to be sensitive to everything in this world, tempted by every stimulus, exposed to every passion ; the characteristic of the former is to be repelled from the ordinary pleasures of the world, to be above them, to feel a warning instinct against them. In the course of life the fate of the ascetic character is to be absorbed in a somewhat chill ideal ; that of the sensuous character is to purchase a fascinating richness of earthly experience by a number of

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grave errors. We had some difficulty formerly in illustrating the distinction between the two characters at once clearly and expressively, but we should have had no such difficulty if Mr. Tennyson had published his new poem a little earlier. The character of Arthur, absorbed in the ideal conception of a chivalrous monarchy, is the very type of the highest abstract or ascetic character ; that of Lancelot, the great knight of many exploits and full-lipped enjoyment, whom Guinevere prefers, is the type of the sensuous and sensitive."

4. "Tennyson is at his best in the elegiac mood."

Or

Tennyson's greatness as an elegiac poet.

A number of factors both personal and social combined to make Tennyson one of the greatest elegiac poets of England. The elegiac note runs through all his poetry, and he is at his best in the elegiac mood.

This elegiac note appears in his poetry quite early. It is there even in the poems of the volume of 1833. *The Lady of Shallot* is a lonely, tragic figure, "sick of shadows", living under a curse, and finally dying a tragic death. In *The Palace of Art*, the soul ultimately falls in despair and finds, "no comfort anywhere". Tithonus doomed to immortality and old age is a sad, pathetic figure wandering amongst strangers like a ghost. The Lotos-Eaters are weighed down with weariness, and suffer from a nameless melancholy. They would like to lie down and give themselves over to, "mild-eyed melancholy". The hero of *Locksley Hall* is frustrated and embittered as a result of the faithlessness of the, 'shallow-hearted', Amy, and fulminates bitterly against womankind and against the times which seem to him out of joint. *Tears, Idle Tears* expresses the tender melancholy, vague regrets and longings of a life lived without love ; *Crossing the Bar* expresses the poet's premonition of his own approaching death ; and *Break, Break, Break*, inspired by the death of Hallam, is one of the most poignant of elegiac lyrics. Any sad tragic event inspired him to song and he could write an immortal Ode even on the death of the Duke of Wellington.

It is to be noted that most of Tennyson's protagonists are sad, melancholy figures, isolated and cut off ; mentally deranged or suffering from some other abnormality. Thus Ulysses cannot adjust himself to the life in the island, and so must go out and wander, and Tithonus roams about like a ghost among strangers and curses his immortality. The lady of Shallot is a lonely figure, living all alone under a tragic curse, and the hero of *Locksley Hall* is a lonely, suffering soul with no bonds of sympathy with any one. After the death of King Arthur, Sir Bedivere is left standing all alone on the shore, and the lover of Maud is a mentally deranged person who

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frustrated in love, goes out to war. All these lonely, melancholy figures are projections of the different facets of the poet's personality; they but reflect his own despair and loneliness of spirit.

In short, the elegiac note looms large in the poetry of tennyson, and he is at his best in the elegiac mood. His *In Memoriam* is the greatest of elegiac in the English language. In this elegy, the poet's expression of grief is personal, sincere and direct. It comes direct from the heart of the poet and goes direct to the heart of the readers. In this respect, it is superior even to *Lycidas* and *Adonais*. It stands alone in the whole range of English literature.

5. Treatment of Melancholy in two poems ;
(a) "Crossing the Bar"
(b) "Break, Break, Break".

A note of melancholy runs through all Tennyson's poetry. All his heroes are lonely, melancholy figures. In *Crossing the Bar*, the placid melancholy results from the poet's premonition of approaching death and in *Break, Break, Break* his intense grief results from the death of his dear friend, Arthur Hallam.

(a) Crossing the Bar

The poem is an allegory. It is on the surface a description of a voyage of the poet from Aldworth to Farrington, but really it is a description of the soul's journey to the unknown land of death. The poet tells of his departure from this world to the Eternal Home which is the kingdom of Heaven. The call (death) comes to him at sunset (in the evening of life) and he leaves his worldly home with a calm and serene mind. His mind is in perfect peace (calm sea) when he undertakes the voyage (dies) and sails to his destination (kingdom of heaven). No sad farewell should be given to him, because he will be carried beyond Time and Place, to the other world, where he will meet God. His journey does not frighten him because he will meet the Pilot (divine guide) at the end of his voyage.

Thus in the poem, "sunset and evening star", symbolise old age, 'the call' is the call of death, and, 'moaning of the bar' symbolises the fear and agony of death. The journey of the soul from this world to the other world is represented through the metaphor of the voyage of a ship across the ocean. This world of ours is the harbour, and tbe 'other world', infinite and Eternal, is the real home of the soul, where it is united once again with the Divine, the 'Pilot', the guide of the human soul.

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(*b*) **Break, Break, Break**

This fine elegy is the outpouring of the poet's intense grief at the death of his friend Arthur Hallam. It must rank for ever among the most poignant elegiac lyrics in the English language, "Simple but elegant, intensely subjective yet disciplined, it strikes Tennyson's most personal and poignant note." That is why, the lyric has been praised by one critic after another. Praising it, writes **John Pettigrew** ; "A deep distress hath humanized my soul', wrote Wordsworth in the *Elegiac Stanzas* prompted by the sudden death of his brother. Deep distress humanizes Tennyson's, too, giving, obviously and immediately, the validity of intense personal experience to the eternal note of sadness that had earlier often been artificial, vapid, sentimental ; there is nothing 'painted' in, *Break, Break, Break*, supremely felt, simple, and disciplined, which will forever stand among the world's great laments. Hallam's death not only nourishes Tennyson's elegiac gifts ; it also sharpens the opposing forces within the divided sensibility, his grief simultaneously encouraging retreat into solitary brooding, and demanding a need to advance."

Morton Luce is of the view that the mere sound of the poem, and the poignancy of its anguish, have such power to take captive our ear and heart, that we sometimes miss the beauty half concealed within it. Few of Tennyson's productions are so spontaneous as this ; yet it is more than a mere cry of despair ; for in none does nature so eloquently express what words and even melody can only conceal. Five times the poet abandons the disguise of speech, and paints his sorrow in a vivid picture. Before us lies the sea, powerless to tell its sobbing trouble to the shore, as wave after wave of utterance dies broken on the cold grey stones. On the shore the children are playing ; what could they know of death ? Out on the bay the sailor boy is singing in the happy activity of life ; in the distance are ships returning from a prosperous voyage, and sailing on majestically to the neighbouring port—four pictures in one. "*And in these the poet expresses more eloquently than in any words the sense of desolation made yet more desolate by contrast with joys it cannot share.*"

6. Ulysses : Is he a brave and inspiring leader or an escapist ?

Or

"Ulysses is the embodiment of the idea of Courage rather than a human being."

Tennyson was not the portrayer of individual, nor of active practical character. His characters, with few exceptions, are generalisations, or refined abstractions, clearly developing certain thoughts, feelings, and forms, and bringing them home to

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all competent sympathies. His characters are not creatures of flesh and blood. There is not much substance in them. They are all generalisations or abstractions. They symbolise some particular idea, and are not rounded, three dimensional figures. Thus his Ulysses is an embodiment of the very spirit of courage and adventure, rather than a living, breathing human being. He is a romantic, with his imagination all aglow with the lure of the far-off, the unknown and the mysterious, lost in contemplation of a distant fairyland, and so incapable of effective action in the present.

Ulysses is a complex work of art and as such can be differently interpreted. It has been interpreted as an expression of the Victorian urge for action, for life, for excitement, for travel, adventure and discovery. But it has also been interpreted as an escape peom. Says **John Pettigrew**, "Ulysses is great if read as a poem expressive of an indomitable will, summoning up every reserve of resolute courage and seeking new worlds to conquer. But, as Tennyson's situation at the time of its writing and the literary tradition that he evokes suggest, Ulysses is far richer than that. Indeed, its essential greatness stems not from the power of noble feeling, but from the complexity of characterization with its conflict of feelings."

That this is so is suggested strongly even by a cursory examination of Ulysses' speech. He talks of noble work and shows us that Ithaca cries out for it, but he is idle and leaves all responsibility to Telemachus. He says that he is following knowledge and seeking fuller life, but he forces us to ask if he is not rather seeking escape from duty in unceasing activity, even in suicide. He is true to himself, but apparently false to his kingdom and his mariners. Is he, proud, or merely egocentric, Promethean, or Satanic? The responsible man of action, or the escapist? Is it he, or Telemachus, who is most like Arthur, 'Ideal manhood closed in real man'? And the contradictions involved in what he says are reinforced by all the resources of a masterly poet. The final passage is frankly escapist :

> *The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks*
> *The long day wanes ; the slow moon climbs ; the deep*
> *Moans round with many voices*

The lines' slow movement and elegiac quality help to stress the element of the escapist and suicidal in Ulysses' motives. So do other things, notably the ambiguity of image and symbol. Ulysses sets out at night (one would surely expect dawn in a work descriptive simply of romantic grandeour). Is the sea calling to a journey of renewal and life, or dreamful ease and death? Is it the sea of the end of *Locksley Hall*, or its other sea of escape? Certainly the seas here are not the 'sounding furrows' Ulysses calls them ;

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no 'mighty wind arises roaring seaward', the landscape is still, the vessel only puffs her sail, the dark seas gloom and moan. Are the Happy Isles the Avilion of *Mort D'Arthur*, a land of renewal, or Lotosland and 'summer isles of Eden'? The final paragraph involves much more than a man braving the struggle of life, for the atmosphere is redolent of death, linked now not primarily with Ithaca as earlier, but with the world beyond—an island that begsn as a kind of sterile Shalott, a land of escape from the responsibility of life.

7. "Tennyson is at his best in his lyrical and descriptive poems"

Or

Tennyson is more of a lyricist than a philosopher.

Or

"Tennyson's imagination is less dramatic than lyrical; he is at his best when kindled by personal emotion and experience."

Or

"The best of Tennyson is in his lyrics. In these he touches the stars."

Tennyson's genius was essentially lyrical. He produced exquisite lyrics all through his long span of poetic activity, and he kept up his power of melody and song right upto the age of eighty. The lyric impulse never dried up in him. Not only was his lyric impulse long-lasting, it was also all-pervasive. It penetrates even his longer poems and dramas. Thus *In Memoriam* is essentially a collection of lyrics which voice the poet's loneliness, doubts, anxieties and fears; *Maud* also is a series of lyrics, in which the story is told largely through these lyrics, and each lyric is an expression of a mood and situation; the songs of *The Princess* constitute the most glorious lyric poetry ever written in the English tougue.

The lyric may either be simple and musical, it may have a 'song-quality' or it may be more complex, mixed with reflection and thought. Tennyson writes both these kinds of lyrics. When the inspiration is upon him, he writes "pure lyrics", lyrics of the highest order, lyrics which sing as if by some magic of their own. Scattered throughout his longer works there are exquisite songs, which are among the finest lyrics in the English language. They have been praised by one critic after another for their simplicity, for their music and melody, and for their intensity and poignancy. Writes **Harold Nicolson**, "For the songs of Tennyson, written separately or as interludes to break the flow of narrative, are among the best in the English language, and in them we find, as rarely in his

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other poems, the absolute ecstasy, the "purest" poetry perhaps, which he ever composed.

Such lyrics are cleary beyond criticism and even elucidation. The key-notes of a lyric are music and melody and subjectivity. A lyric is musical, and it is an expression of the poet's personal emotions. Tennyson's lyrics are among the most musical in the English language. Words are carefully chosen both with reference to their sense and their sound. His skill in the manipulation of vowel sounds, in the use of alliteration and liquid consonants, and in the avoidance of harsher sounds, has been universally acknowledged. His music is dexterously varied according to the requirements of thought and emotion. In *Maud*, for example, there are subtle variations in cadence according to mood and situation, and *In Memoriam* subtle variations are introduced in pause, cadence and rhythm, and thus monotony is avoided with great art and skill. In the *Lotos-Eaters*, the longurous music of the long-drawn outline expresses to a nicety the lethargy and the longing for rest of the sailors who have eaten the lotos fruit. As **Selincourt** points out the charm of the best lyrics of his lies in the spell of words, in the secret and indefinable beauty of words and tune. *The Brook, Come down into the Garden Maud*; *Break, Break Break*, etc., are triumphs of Tennyson's musical skill. He is second to none in this respect.

Tennyson's genius was essentially subjective, he had the true temperament of a lyricist. His genius was not at all dramatic. He may write of other characters, but the thought and emotion of his dramatic personages are his own. Whatever may be the subject chosen, it is coloured by his own personal moods and emotions. Thus his *Ulysses*, a classical lyric, written after Hallam's death, expresses his own urge to move forward and face life despite the bereavement he has suffered. *The Idylls of the King* are similarly suffused with the poet's own moods and emotions. Thus the gloom of Sir Bedivere at the passing away of Arthur is Tennyson's own mood at the recent death of his friend. *Crossing the Bar* is expressive of the mood of the poet just on the eve of his death. It is prophetic, the dark shadow of approaching death has already fallen across the soul of the poet. All his life Tennyson was a lonely soul full of terror and despair, and this haunting wail of terror and despair is heard again and again in Tennyson's lyrics.

This is more so the case with the lyrics of the *In Memoriam*. The pieces are the finest example of the lyrics in which personal emotion is interwoven with reflective matter, resulting in complexity rather than simplicity, and as **O. Elton** points out, such complex lyrics are more characteristic of the poet. The lyrics of *In Memoriam* are a landmark in English poetry, combining, as they do, the poetry of ideas with the poetry of feeling. **O. Elton** rightly says that

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the power of the elegy lies less in, "playing over ideas than in playing with the logic of feeling—in the analysis of grief and hope, of memory and vision." The lyrics of *In Memoriam* are remarkable as expressions of terror, loneliness, and the inner void that turns Nature and Life into nightmares.

J. C. Grierson in his *Critical History of English Poetry* points out that Tennyson is a poet of, "not so much of passion and passionate thinking as of moods—moods, subtle, and luxurious and sombre, moods in which it is not always easy to discern the line that separates waking from dreaming...." The moods to which Tennyson has given poetic expression are as varied as his metres, and include a rare feeling for the beauty of English scenery, the mind of the peasant in many of its phases, humorous and tragic, the interpretation of classical legend, the reproduction of the soul of some Greek and Roman poets, the colour and beauty, if not all the peculiar ethical and religious tone, of medieval romance, complexities of mind and even pathological subtleties of emotion, the brooding of a sensitive spirit over the riddles of life and death, and good and evil. This variety of moods is best illustrated by *Maud*, a *Monodrama* in which the entire story of the wooing and winning of a girl has been told through a series of exquisite lyrics which have no parallel in the English language.

Tennyson was a great lyric-poet, he had the temperament of a true lyricist, but the lyric impulse in him was not allowed free play by his other interests, narrative, dramatic, philosophical even epic. As **Harold Nicolson** in his book on Tennyson points out, "Temperamentally he possessed all the qualities of a lyric poet. His genins was essentially subjective. His was a lonely soul, melancholy and afraid. The deepest note in his soul is one of frightened agony, as of some, wild creature caught in a trap at night." But this lyric element in his genius was retarded by the fact that, he was unable, except in isolated moments, to dissociate his lyrical energy from all other energies—ethical, theological and didactic. Had he been less reserved and allowed his lyric emotion a freer flow, had he realised that what he felt was infinitely more important than what he thought, he would have been the greatest lyric poet of his day." But his lyric gift was lost in his prophetic mission.

Spontaneity is an important quality of the true lyric. The lyric poet sings with strains of unpremeditated art, but Tennyson is too self-conscious, there is too much of after-thought, too much of revision and excision for such spontaneity. The artist and the philosopher in 'him retards his lyrical impulse and it is only occasionally that his lyrics acquire that spontaneity which we associate with Shelley and Burns. Tennyson's lyrics do not seem to come directly from the heart, and so they do not go to the

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heart of the readers. The reason is that they are not produced by a spontaneous inspiration and there seems to be a conscious and deliberate artistic effort behind them. The artistic embelishment of his lyrics stands in the way of their free, musical flow and they seem more to be the lyrics to be read than to be sung.

Tennyson is a great lyric poet. but owing to such shortcomings he cannot take his rank with the greatest lyric poets of the world. "The Olympian radiance of a lyric by Sappho or Sopphocles, the audible ring of Shelley's lyrics, the moving quality of Shakespeare's songs, or the piercing pathos of the Scottish songs of Burns and Scott, is hard to find in Tennyson's lyrics."

Tennyson was a lyricist—more of a lyricist than a philosopher or a dramatistst/and he is at his best in his pure lyrics. In them he may truly be said to touch the stars. He is equally great in the passages of nature-description scattered all up and down his works. Says **R. H. Horne** in this connection, "In the description of nature in England, no one has ever surpassed Tennyson. The union of fidelity to nature and extreme beauty is scarcely to be found in an equal degree in any other writer. No poet more closely adheres to nature. He is generally as sweet, and fresh, and faithful in his drawing and colouring of a landscape, as the prose pastorals of Miss Mitford. With Tennyson there is no tendency to inventiveness in his descriptions of scenery ; he contents himself with the loveliness of the truth seen through the medium of such emotion as belongs to the subject he has in hand".

In his descriptions of Nature, he can give us large effects, as in this epitome of an autumn storm,

The last red leaf is whirled away,
The rooks are blown about the sky.

and the superb image of,

Such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam.

And he can impress us also with microscopic effects. "*Indeed, excepting Crabbe, no poet ever dealt with the minutie of Nature so well as Tennyson.*" Could anything be more apt for combined accuracy of perception and beauty of delineation than touches such as these : Of the dragon fly,

A living flash of light he flew ;

Of the sunflower,

Rays round with flames her disc of seed

Of dark hair,

More black than ash buds in the front of March.

He reminds us with delicate emphasis how, with the coming of

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spring, "rosy plumelets tuft the larch" ; how autumn lays, "a fiery finger on the leaves": and notes with the eye of a naturalist, "the primrose of the latter year." We feel that he has actually seen all that he describes. Never does his fancy carry him into the realm of unreal imagery. "Everywhere indeed the observation of the scientist is glorified by the sensibility of the artist, the stark fact clad in lovely imagery."

8. The Lotos-Eaters : Its Theme and Imagery

'The Lotos-Eaters' is a complex work of art and as such different views have been expressed regarding its theme and significance. It has been interpreted in different ways by different scholars. Quite obviously, it sounds the romantic note of escapism. Just as Keats in his famous *Ode to the Nightingale* would like to escape the pressure of reality by taking wine, so also the sailors want to escape the responsibilities of life as soon as they have taken the lotos fruit. But does Tennyson favour a life of escape from the duties of life ? Apparently, he gives arguments after arguments in favour of a life of complete rest and inactivity, but in reality his attitude towards such a life is ironic. Man is roof and crown of things, and so he must not live like the animals, or other objects of nature. He must justify his superiority by action and achievement. Thus the arguments advanced by the sailors cut both ways.

John Pettigrew comapres the poem to T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and writes, "Lotos-land offers not abundant life but spiritual 'death ; it is no. Garden of the Hesperides but a magnificently ironic variation upon a wasteland." As in Eliot's poem, hollow men live (or rather exist) in a trance-like state with, 'tried eyelids upon tired eyes', their voices, 'thin/Like voices from the grave', isolated from other men and unable to communicate with them, cut off from communication with family, country and a meaningful and vitalizing Nature. "In both poems, the past has become a bucket of ashes, a heap of broken images : fragmented and dimly remembered, it also is incapacable of giving a sustenance which is not wanted any way : 'Let what is broken so remain'."

The Epicurean gods of the Lotos land are as remote as Eliot's dying and buried gods ; here too men believe that 'Death is the end of life'. In both poems, enervation of spirit is refracted through symbolic landscape ; the waters of the 'hateful sea' of troubles and life are as resented as the spring rains of *The Waste Land* stirring memory and desire. The 'land of dreams' has waters as turgid as Eliot's Thames : rivers flow seaward but seem to wind up in marshes nourishing galingales ; waterfalls, with their conventional associations with 'strength of spirit, full and free', are only 'slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn' and their sheets of foam only 'slumbrous'. And on the island it 'seemed always afternoon',

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sunsets linger, and all things, 'ripen toward the grave,' in silence'. "Lotosland has yellow down and sleeping poppies, thick-twined vine and weeping, long-leaved flowers, not Eliot's dull roots, city streets and endless plains, but it is, as surely as Eliot's, 'Waste Land', a spiritual desert."

The Lotos-Eaters is a peom of many artistic merits. Its imagery is sensuous, vivid and accurate. A number of word-pictures follow each other in quick succession, and each one serves to evoke some one aspect or the other of the lotos-land before the mind's eye. In that island it is always afternoon, a time when people feel drowsy and are inclined to sleep. The air is languid and seems to swoon, and, the sunset lingers in the west, as if charmed. Tennyson's art reaches perfection in the beautiful image which describes the waterfall which, "Along the cliff to fall and pause and fall did seem." The interior of the island consists of yellow downs bordered with palms and grown over with, "slender galingale" The lotos-eaters come to the sailors of Ulysses and give them lotos fruit and flowers, and whosoever eats them at once feels drowsy and sleepy. We get one of the most beautiful word-pictures in the poem as the sailors, as if exhausted, sit on the sand, "Between the Sun and the Moon upon the Shore." The sea, the oar, and the wandering foam all seem to them 'weary', and they decide that, "we will no longer roam" but lie there dreaming, "Of child, and wife and slave." Thus the nature background is in close harmony with the mood of the sailors ; the poem is a fine example of interior landscape-painting.

9. Lady of Shallot : Symbolism and Pictorial Quality.

The 'Lady of Shallot', though a comparatively early work, is a poem of many artistic merits. It can be read on many levels. It is a little fairy tale for children, as well as a poem which can be interpreted symbolically and allegorically.

While **Gerard Manley Hopkins** praises the poem, as, "pure, sensuous poetry", to be enjoyed for its romance, for its pictures and for its music, there are others who are not content to take it as a glittering fairy tale, and interpret it allegorically. The poem is certainly not a modern allegory or symbolic poem, but we may, if we so desire, discover in it a hidden moral significance. Its story shows that a life of isolation, cut off from reality, is bound to result in frustration and tragedy. The day-dreams of an artist are shattered as soon as they come in contact with outside reality. The Lady thus symbolises the retired artist or poet living in his ivory tower, her web the work of art on which he works, and the curse, the contact with harsh reality. As soon as the artist faces the reality of life, his dreams are shattered. Writes **J. B. Steane** in this connection, *"The Lady of Shalott'*, then, is not an allegory, though, as in *Mariana*, the images sometimes have

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the power of symbols. The mirror, for instance, suggests much beyond its role as an item in a fairy story. For as the Lady weaves, 'the mirror's magic sights', in her tapestry she is herself partly taking the role of the artist, and her existence in the island castle has something in common with the artist's apartness. Moreover, as she sees reality only through her mirror, so the artist may tend to experience vicariously, drawing his knowledge not from direct contact, but from other works of art. He has his own special nature, like the Lady ; partly an affliction to him, this sense of difference, partly a blessing and possibly the very condition of his being an artist at all. For life in the ordinary day-to-day world he may be all unfit, as was the Lady, and, for him as for her, only disaster may follow the attempt to break bonds. This is not 'the message' of *The Lady of Shalott*, but it is, I think, a part of the ground out of which the poem grew."

The poem is to be enjoyed for its beautiful, vivid pictures, which pass before the mind's eye in quick successsion. There are a numher of pictures ; the river and the highroad and the fields ; the castle on the island, and the room with the lady weaving her magic web, and the moving scene outside reflected in the mirror ; Sir Lancelot riding by, and the lady leaving her room to look after him from the window ; the broken web and the cracked mirror ; the Lady of Shalott, "robed in snowy white," floating down the stream in her boat and singing her last song, and then gliding "death-pale" between the houses of Camelot, while, "Knight and burgher, lord and dame," come out upon the wharfs to look at her, and Sir Lancelot is stricken with wondering pity. Exquisite and telling similes and metaphors are used to vivify the narrative and to make the readers see with their mind's eye the scene which is being described. One of the most beautiful word pictures in the poem is the one in which Sir Lancelot is likened to a meteor shooting across the sky.

All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick jewell'd shown the saddle leather,
The helmet and the helmet feather
Burn'd like one burning flame together,
As he rode down to Camelot,
As often thro' the purple night,
Below the starry clusters bright
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
Moved over still Shalott.

The image has been admired by all readers of Tennyson.

Admiring Tennyson's word-painting in the poem **J.S. Mill** writes, "In powers of narrative and scene-painting combined, this poem must be ranked among the very first of its class. The

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delineation of outward objects, as in the greater number of Mr. Tennyson's poems, is not picturesque, but statuesque ; with brilliancy of colour superadded. The forms are not, as in painting, of unequal degrees of definiteness ; the tints do not melt gradually into each other, but each individual object stands out in bold relief, with a clear decided outline. This statue-like precision and distinctness, few artists have been able to give to so essentially vague a language as that of words : but if once this difficulty be got over, scene-painting by words has a wider range than either painting or sculpture ; for it can represent not only with the vividness and strength of the one, but with the clearness and definiteness of the other, objects in motion. Along with all this, there is in the poem all that power of making a few touches do the whole work, which excites our admiration in Coleridge. Every line suggests so much more than it says, that much may be left unsaid ; the concentration, which is the soul of narrative, is obtained, without the sacrifice of reality and life. Where the march of the story requires that the mind should pause, details are specified ; where rapidity is necessary, they are all brought before us at a flash. Except that the versification is less exquisite, the '*Lady of Shalott*' is entitled to a place by the side of the '*Ancient Mariner*' and '*Christabel*'."

10. The theme of "Tithonus" : contrast between youth and age, and love and death

The theme of *Tithonus* is the contrast between youth and age and love and death. It is based on the classical myth of the love of goddess Aurora symbolising Beauth, Youth and Love for Tithonus, symbolising old age and death. Its story is told in the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite*. Tithonus, according to the myth, was beloved by Aurora, the goddess of the Dawn, who, at his request, made him immortal. Since, however, he had omitted to ask for the perpetuation of his youth and beauty, he grew ever more old and decrepit, till life becoming insupportable, he prayed Aurora to "take back her gift."

Tithonus remembers his youth, and the pleasures of love he then enjoyed. Now he is old, incapable of love, and his present wretched state is contrasted both with his own vanished youth and the youth and beauty of the goddess. Yearning for his vanished youth, Tithonus sighs,

To dwell in presence of immortal youth,
Immortal age beside immortal youth.
And all I was in ashes. Can thy love,
The beauty, make amends, tho' even now,
Close over us, the silver star, thy guide,
Shines in those tremulous eyes that fill with tears
To hear me ? Let me go ; take back thy gift.

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Why should a man desire in any way
To vary from the kindly race of men,
Or pass beyond the goal of ordinance.

The tone of the poem is elegiac. Tithonus has grown old, "a white-haired ghost roaming like a dream". He does no longer have his previous glory, he is a mere shadow of his former self, while Aurora still continues to be young and beautiful. Pathetically, he says that he is, "Immortal age besides immortal youth," and this companionship cannot endure for any length of time. He no longer feels the youthful sensation which Aurora's youth and beauty inspired in him earlier : his blood does no longer glow with passion at the sight of her beautiful cheeks and shoulders. Therefore, he asks the goddess to take back the gift of immortality she has granted to him, and put him back on earch, so that he too may die like other 'hapyy man' there. To Tithonus, broken and decrepit with age, men in their mortality appear to be happy, for they can shake off their worn out physical selves, and thus renew their youth and vigour, while he himself is condemned to eternal immortality and so also to eternal old age and weak and shadowy existence.

11. "Some special characteristics of the Victorian Age reflected in Tennyson's poetry"

Or

Tennyson's poetry as representative of the Victorian age

Or

"Tennyson is the typical Victorian, the poet of compromise"

Or

"A great poet in writing of himself, writes of his times"

Tennyson represents his age, not in fragments, but completely. He expresses in his poetry, even when he is most subjective and personal, the very spirit of the Victorian era. He may be writing of himself, of his personal joys and sorrows, but even then he writes of his age and renders its chief characteristics. "For nearly half a century" says **W.J. Long**, "Tennyson was not only a man and a poet, he was a voice, the voice of a whole people, expressing in exquisite melody their doubts and their faith, their griefs and their triumphs. As a poet who expresses not so much a personal as a national spirit, he is probably the most representative literary man of the Victorian era."

The three important movements of the age were (*a*) Industrial revolution, (*b*) the rise of democracy, and (*c*) the rise of evolutionary

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science and its impact on religion. In all these matters Tennyson's views are characterised by the famous Victorian compromise or the avoidance of extremes. With the excesses of the French Revolution still fresh in their memory, the Victorians had a natural horror of all revolutionary enthusiasm. They craved for law, for peace and stability. The dominant element in Tennyson's thought is his sense of law and order. He refers to the French Revolution as, "Red fool fury of the Seine", and advocates slow progress, the freedom which,

Slowly broadens down
From precedent to precedent

He believes in disciplined, ordered evolution, rather than in revolution.

The Victorian age was an age of intense patriotism. The Victorians were proud of their Queen, they were proud of their country, and of their empire. This narrow nationalism of his age is reflected fully in Tennyson's poetry. "Love thou thy land", is his motto and not international love. Similarly, he believes in imperialism, that, 'subject races preferred good British government to self-government'. In other words, he shares the current belief in 'white man's burden'. And in keeping with this he believes in a strong navy for England and writes proper national and patriotic poems such as *Maud*, *Charge of the Light Brigade*, and *Ode to the Duke of Wellington*.

It was an age in which the democratic spirit was rising and the people were clamouring for equal rights and political freedom. Tennyson's attitude is one of compromise between the claims of the masses and the continuation of the older landed aristocracy. While he is in full sympathy with all sound measures for the amelioration of the poor, there is always a touch of the aristocrat in his attitude. He has no sympathy with the demand for equaliy, and in poems like *The Lord of Burleigh* he supports the claims of the landed aristocracy. One aspect of the rise of democracy was the movement for the emancipation of women. Tennyson deals with the question in *The Princess*. While he is in full sympathy for the cause of woman's education, his attitude towards the whole question is typically Victorian. The proper place of women is within the home, and they should try to be good housewifes and enjoy the blessed life of the home.

As a result of the industrial revolution, the country was enjoying an unprecedented economic prosperity. This Mammon worship of his age is reflected in his *Maud, a Monodrama*. It reflects the unprecedented commercial prosperity of England at a time when "Britain's sole God", was the millionaire. It also renders

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the revolt of a cultured mind against the corruption and hypocrisy of a society degraded by the worship of money.

Tennyson represents the Victorian prudery, hapocrisy, and the spirit of compromise in his treatment of love, sex and marriage. In these matters, his attitude is typically Victorian. Conjugal love rather than romantic love is his ideal ; he has a horror of illicit passion. He cannot even contemplate the possibility of any relation between man and woman other than the conjugal. He emphasises the cultivation of domestic virtues of the home. He idealises married life.

The Victorians believed that the aim of literature is essentially moral. They had a particular fascination for moralising and teaching lessons of morality to the younger generations. In this respect Tennyson is the mouthpiece of the Victorians. In his poetry there is a strong feeling for moral preaching and ethical edification. He is a moralist giving to his readers proper guidance for the wise conduct of life. He turned to the Greek legends not so much for the sake of their beauty as for their ethical significance. The legendary Ulysses imparts the message of action and urges the readers to,

Strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield

In this way, he also represents the spirit of adventure, the urge for travel and discovery that stirred the age.

Another important event of Victorian England was the rise of evolutionary science and its impact on religious faith. The impact of science on his poetry is seen nowhere to such advantage as in his treatment of nature. It is seen in his minuteness of observation and accuracy and preciseness of delineation. He sees both sides of the picture—the harsher as well as the pleasanter—and is quite aware of the brutal struggle for existence that goes on everywhere in the external world. He finds nature, "red in tooth and claw", full of rapine and plunder. Indeed, the scientific spirit has rather a chilling effect on imagination, and this lack of imagination characterises Tennyson's nature-poetry.

The rise of science resulted in religious scepticism, doubts, anxieties and uncertainties and Tennyson is a typical Victorian in his efforts to reach a compromise between science and religion. Thus in a famous passage in *In Memoriam*, he says,

Let knowledge grow from more to more
And more of reverence in us dwell
That mind and soul, according well
May make one music as before.

He would have science, but he would also have religion, and he would have the two work in harmony for the realisation of the

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Victorian dream of progress unlimited. In some poems and stanzas of *In Memoriam*, he puts forward the claims of science. He upholds the theory of Evolution propounded by Darwin, and supports the view that honest doubt is better than blind faith. In others, he emphasises the claims of religion, God and soul. He triumphantly declares his faith in God and the immortality of the soul and in a life beyond death. He advises the people of his age to cling to faith beyond all forms of faith, to trust and hope to look to,

One far-off divine event
To which the whole creation move

Thus in all these respects, Tennyson represents the Victorian smuggness, its narrowness, its hypocrisy, its compromise, its prudery, its doubts, anxieties and uncertainties. But when all is said and done, it is as an artist that we reverence him, and it is as an artist that he will live.

12. "In Memoriam" is a poem of despair

In Memoriam is the greatest of elegies in the English language. It was inspired by the death of the poet's intimate friend Arthur Hallam, and as its title indicates, it was written in his memory and it has immortalised the memory. But *In Memoriam* would not be a great work of art, if it were merely the embodiment of personal grief. In fact *In Memoriam* is much more than that ; it is also an expression of the poet's reflections on God, Nature, soul, and the mystery of life and death. It also expresses the doubts and uncertainties of the age. Indeed, the best and most lyrical passages in the elegy are those where the poet becomes the conscience and voice of the age and gives poetic form to its spiritual troubles.

As **Perceival** points out, *"besides the elegy, there also runs a theology"*. It is also an expression of the poet's views on God, Nature, Immortality of the soul, and the mystery of life and death. It traces the way of the soul from grief and despair, through the conquest of that despair, to ultimate hope and joy. It is a record of Tennyson's spiritual troubles, and as his spiritual troubles are also those of his age, *In Memoriam* is also a valuable social document, a faithful record of the doubts and uncertainties, hopes and aspirations of the times in which it was written. Evolutionary science had given a knock out blow to the traditional theories of creation, and faith both in God and Nature was shaken. *In Memoriam* reflects this loss of faith. If God is merciful, and He has a holy plan, why is there so much of suffering, such brutal struggle for existence and pain and death ? Thus in Tennyson's breast, and in the age, there was a conflict between science and religion. God's omnipotence and

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His Love were hard to reconcile with the fact of suffering. Tennyson's plea is for a compromise between science and Religion and he stresses that such a reconciliation can be possible only through faith, and not through knowledge.

In Memoriam cannot be called a poem of despair, for by the end the poet overcomes his doubts and uncertainties, asserts his faith in God and ends on a note of hope in some far off divine event, towards which, he feels, the whole creation moves :

That God, which ever lives and loves
One God, one law, one element
And one far off divine event
To which the whole creation moves.

13. 20th century reaction against Tennyson

Or

Some shortcomings and limitations of Tennyson

The 20th century reaction against Tennyson is by no means wholly unjustified. There are certain features of his poetry which justify it. *First* he is a Victorian poet, and this is his strength, as well as his weakness. His ideas have grown out-dated and they do not appeal to a new generation in a new age.

Secondly, Tennyson was a poet, and not a philosopher, but he uses his poetry as a vehicle for the expression of his views on God, religion, and the immortality of the soul. Instead of merely expressing his ideas with the emotions accompanying them, he argues about them and tries to systematise them, and fails in the attempt. Neither is there any originality about his ideas. What he says had already been said more precisely and forcefully by far more competent thinkers.

Thirdly, as *Bradley* tells us, some of his poetry is touched with the spirit of ephemeral controversy. The advance of contemporary science, the theories of Darwin, more specially, fully revealed to him the conflict, pain, and waste that is in nature, the brutal struggle for existence that rages within her. This meant, in other words, that there is evil and ugliness not in man alone, but also in God, that the ultimate power is not wholly good and beautiful, as has been supposed by conventional Christianity. Hence the doubts and uncertainties of *In Memoriam*, hence the need again and again to re-assert his faith in the face of the mounting tide of materialism. Hence arises the argumentative tone of his religious poetry. This accounts also for the reputation of the philosopher-teacher which he acquired, which his un-wise admirers stressed, and which blinded many to his real excellence. This has caused the greatest damage to Tennyson's reputation.

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Fourthly, in his morality and ethics also Tennyson is conventional and out-dated. His attitude towards sex is characterised by the Victorian prudery. We do not get in him any free and frank treatment of sex. There is nothing startling or arresting about his ethics The virtues that he cared for are mainly of one type ; self-control, self-sacrifice, faithfulness, loyalty to law and to obligations, personal and social. Faith in order and law is inherent in his scheme of life ; where there is clash between love and duty, love must give way. Obviously, there is nothing arresting about such ideas, and they do not resemble the ideas which acquired popularity with the opening of the new century. Hence it is that he has come to be regarded as a dated poet, and his popularity has accordingly suffered.

Fifthly, Tennyson's genius was essentially lyrical, but increasingly he devoted his attention to long narrative poems. In his own day *The Idylls of the King* was immensely popular, and did much to enhance his reputation as a poet. But with the passing of time the *Idylls* have caused the greatest damage to his reputation. This is so because they reveal many of the faults and shortcomings of the poet. They have countless beautiful passages, but as a whole they fail to satisfy. In the morality and the allegory there is nothing new and original, and the Idylls fails in the delineation of human character. This failure in characterisation, as well as their looseness in construction, has been pounced upon by critics and exposed threadbare.

Sixthly, Tennyson's style also has certain glaring faults. More often than not, at least in his longer poems, his style suffers from elaborateness or over-ornamentation. In a good deal of his non-lyrical poetry, in most of his long narrative poems, his art degenerates into artifice, "and there is much glossy polish, or irrelevant jewelry." In other words, his narrative poetry is elaborate in a way or a degree that is faulty. He is often mannered. In the later *Idylls*, says **Bradley** "one is conscious of effort and artifice, and often of the mannerism to which they led."

Sometimes, he took his subject from the past and tried to modernise it, *at other times*, he treated of contemporary subjects and problems, but tried to throw over them the romantic glow of a by-gone age. He often failed, and the mixture of the old and the new, the modern and the medieval, is incongruous and strikes a jarring note. The old stories of Arthur's death and of the sleeping Beauty enchanted him ; but when he retold them, he added Prologues and Epilogues which show his intention to modernize ; and his Lotos-Eaters and Ulysses were certainly not meant to be those of Homer.

Such are Tennyson's limitations, and they are at the root of the reaction against him. Over-estimation is bound to result

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in a reaction equally extreme, and it was so in the case of Tennyson as well. The reading public was blinded to his greatness as an artist in the use of words, to the music and melody of his poetry, and to the precision, accuracy, and vividness of his nature-poetry. Reaction against this attitude set in early in the present century and to-day there is a more just, sane and balanced estimation of Tennyson's poetry.

14. Tennyson's poetic art

Or

"Tennyson can give his readers moments of pleasure, of phrase, of music, of imagery, not to be equalled elsewhere".

Or

"In Tennyson, subjects either outmoded or essentially insignificant are made to bear too heavy a weight of ornament."

Tennyson was a consummate artist. He polished and repolished his verses, till near perfection was reached. The result is that his style is marked by sincerity, clarity, lucidity, and simplicity. He is never ambiguous or uncertain. His language is uniformly excellent, never mean, shabby or low. His diction has sublimity, dignity and stateliness about it. His imagery, similes and metaphors, words and phrases, are original and apt. Every word is carefully chosen both with reference to its sense and sound, and in this way his diction becomes melodious and musical.

Tennyson tries to say whatever he has to say in the fewest possible words. The result is that his style acquires an epigrammatic terseness, finish and polish Every word is carefully chosen and every phrase in well-chiselled.

Tennyson is a great painter of word-pictures. With the exception of Keats and Shakespeare, no other English poet has given us so many, such gorgeous, and such vivid word-pictures as Tennyson. As **E. Albert** puts it, "his method is to seize upon appropriate details, dress them in expressive and musical phrases, and thus throw a glistening image before the readers' eyes." Says **Hadow**, "There is no English poet who can set before us more clearly and more concisely the essential features of a scene or landscape." How wonderful is the following,

And at their feet the crocus brake the fire

or this from *Ulysses*.

Through scudding drifts the rainy Hyades vext the dim sea ;

Tennyson has a Keats-like power of using telling and sensuous words and phrases, which give us at a flash, as it were, a complete

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picture. For example ; crisping ripples, slumber's holy balm, thick-twined vine, creamy spray, dewy echoes, mild-minded melancholy, spicy downs, wallowing monster. (*Lotos-Eaters*).

As **G.C. Macaulay** points out, Tennyson's use of simile and metaphor is characterised by originality and aptness. He avoids the use of stock and hackneyed figures of speech ; his imagery is highly original, and individual, and it seems to vivify a scene and present it to the imagination of the reader. How picturesque and illuminating is the imagery used in the following :

To dream and dream, like yonder amber light
Which will not leave the myrrh-bush on the height

Tennyson's similes in many cases "do not so much appeal to common experience, as bring before us some special thing or some peculiar aspect of nature, which the poet has vividly present to his own mind, while to the reader perhaps the picture suggested may be quite unfamiliar." As example we may take the following from *Enoch Arden* :

So now that shadow of mischance appear'd
No graver than as when some little cloud
Cuts off the fiery highway of the sun,
And isles alight in the offing

However, often there is an over abundance of such imagery which cloys by its very excess. Tennyson is often guilty of over-ornamentation. He lacks in artistic self-control. At other times such ornamentation is used for trivial and insignificant subjects, and the mean and the low is glorified and...lifted.

Another characteristic of Tennyson's art is his avoidance of the commonplace. He not only rigidly excludes all commonplace, stock epithets and stopgap phrases even when writing on a trivial theme, but often, where other writers would use some familiar, well-worn word, he selects one less known but equally true and expressive. Occasionally, he prefers a word of his own coinage, as tonguester, selfless, etc. This tendency to avoid the commonplace is noticeable not only in separate words, but in the rendering of ideas, a poetic dress being given to prosaic details by a kind of stately circumlocution ; thus in *The Princess* the hero's northern birthplace is indicated by his telling us that, "On my cradle shone the Northern Star", and, in the same poem, the blue smoke rising from household chimneys is described as "azure pillars of the hearth".

Tennyson had the unique gift of making the sound of his words fit the sense. The sound of his words often echoes the sense. For example in the following,

The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
His feet on jutes of slippery rock that rang,
Sharp smitten with the dint of armed heels.

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we see the black rock, we hear the clang of steel, and at just the right moment a flash of wet surface flies across the line and the picture is complete. "There is nothing here which can be called a device, no conscious effort, no appearance of deliberation or selection ; he seems but to say the simplest thing in the simplest words, yet no melody of Beethoven, shining after a passion of storm, could give us the feeling of a more intimate and personal relief".

Tennyson is one of the most musical of English poets. Music and melody is created by the skilful use of sonorous and musical words, alliteration, concentration of vowel sounds by using monosyllabic words, and the use of liquid consonants 'l', 'm', and 'n'. Examples of melodious lines are to be found spread at large on every page of Tennyson's poetry. For example, in the following, music is created by the clever use of vowel sounds,

So all day long the noise of battle rolled,
Among the mountains by the winter sea.

Equally skilful is his use of alliteration and liquid consonants. No man ever knew better the value of alliteration, and the still greater value of contrast and inter change. It would be no more possible to alter a word in either of these lines than to alter a note in one of the great tunes of Mozart. Says Wallace, "In no English poet, perhaps only in Homer and Virgil, is the kinship of poetry and music so evident as in Tennyson". We do not get such pleasure anywhere else among the English poets.

Tennyson was a great metrical artist who experimented with, and used with complete mastery, a number of metres and verse forms. *The Lady of Shalott* is the triumph of metrical art. The entire poem is written in a stanza of seven lines, the first four all with the same rhyme ending, and a refrain after the third and fourth lines. It is a difficult metre but Tennyson has handled it with great success. In *The Lotos-Eaters* the skill of the poet has further matured. The introductory lines are in the Spenserian stanza which, according to Auden, has not been handled with equal skill by any one else since Spenser. In *In Memoriam* Tennyson perfected the stanza of four iambic lines of four feet each with enclosed rhymes (*a b b a*). His use of this difficult stanza is eminently successful. "Tennyson succeeded in giving it such variation as was necessary by adapting it to the changing moods of his poem, by a skilful use of vowel music and alliteration ; by occasional inversion of rhythm, by running of sense over from line to line, even from stanza to stanza, and other such devices". Tennyson used blank verse in *The Princess*, *The Idylls of the King* and the *English Idylls*. "His use of blank verse", says **Wallac**, "while less powerful than Milton's at his best always remains at a high level of excellence, and its simple grandeur of style and expression is peculiarly his own." His blank

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verse is skilfully varied according to the requirements of thought and emotion.

Tennyson's mastery over rhythm and metre is seen even to better advantage in his lyrics. "Beneath his hand the tiniest lyric stanza unfolds, the stiffest metre becomes flexible. So long as pure beauty has power to move, so long as it draws its materials from tone and rhythm and its principles from a wise organisation and control, so long will Tennyson take high rank among the great craftsmen of language."

As **Cazamian** points out, "*Tennyson was the heir to the romantic tradition, and he completes and corrects it by incorporating in it the essential tenets of classicism*". In his poetry romanticism finds its balance, and its excesses are corrected and modified by the painstaking efforts of a sincere artist. **Compton-Rickett's** praise of his art is eloquent ; "of Tennyson's work as a literary artist, and as a painter of English life, no lover of beautiful verse could speak too highly. As a word painter of typical English scenery, as the exponent of the simple emotions of everybody life, he holds a treasured and honourable place. His delicacy and crystalline charm, his dignified and melodious utterance, will always endear him to English men and women". In no other English poet, do we get such pleasures of phrase, of imagery, and of music.

15. Tennyson's nature-poetry

Or

Originality and greatness of Tennyson as a nature-poet

Tennyson is a great and original nature poet, and in his nature-poetry the impact on him of contemporary science can best be studied. It is seen in the minuteness and exactness of his observation. His attitude to Nature is not that of Wordsworth. His view of Nature is that of science – that Nature is full of the brutal struggle for existence. He finds her, "red in tooth and claw". He does not paint her as a kindly mother. Looking at Nature the poet does not find any evidence to support the human faith in the immortality of the soul. This is his argument in his masterpiece, *In Memoriam*. But as an artist he makes excellent use of Nature as a background to human action. He knew how to relate the natural background to the mood of a lyric or a longer poem. The *Lotos Eaters* is the best example of interior landscape-painting. The poem displays his unrivalled powers of observation. Tennyson is simply superb in using nature to intensify human moods.

In his descriptions of Nature, he can give us large effects, as in this epitome of an autumn storm,

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The last red leaf is whirled away
The rooks are blown about the sky

and the superb image of,

Such a tide as moving seems asleep
Too full for sound and foam.

And he can impress us also with microscopic effects. "Indeed, excepting Crabbe, no poet ever dealt with the minute of Nature so well as Tennyson." Could anything be more apt for combined accuracy of perception and beauty of delineation than touches such as these ; Of the dragon fly,

A living flash of light he flew

Of the sunflower,

Rays wound with flames her disc of seed

and of dark hair,

More black than ash buds in the front of March

He reminds us with delicate emphasis how, with the coming of spring, "rosy plumelets tuft the larch", how autumn lays, "a fiery finger on the leaves" ; and notes with the eye of a naturalist, "the primrose of the later year." We feel that he has actually seen all that he describes. Never does his fancy carry him into the realm of unreal imagery. "Everywhere indeed the observation of the scientist is glorified by the sensibility of the artist ; the stark fact is clad in lovely imagery."

And if the objective, scientific touch is one feature of his Nature poetry, another feature lies in its atmospheric subjectivity. Tennyson never paints Nature with Wordsworth, or even Byron, as something outside of Man, with a life, spirit and purpose of its own. Nature for him is always a background for reflecting some human emotion ; it carries no message or blessing of its own, but harmonises with the moods of man. Thus in depicting moods of indolence, of sorrow, of love, he chooses such scenic background as may best accentuate these moods. In *The Lotos-Eaters*, the companions of Ulysses read their own feelings into their surroundings ; while the poet suggests by many subtle touches how well the dreamy, languid atmosphere of the place chimes in with their mood.

While Wordsworth observed nature only in her spring-time glory, Tennyson readers her both when she is in desolation, and when she is decked out in her Sunday best. He does not shut her eyes to the wilder and the harsher in nature. He finds a brutal struggle for existence going on everywhere in Nature. For him, Nature is, "red in tooth and claw". In *Maud* he draws the atten-

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tion of his readers to the sinister and harsher aspects of nature, to the cruelty and bloodshed that is Nature's law ;

For Nature is one with rapine, a harm no preacher can heal,

The Mayfly is torn by the swallow, the sparrow is pursued by the shrike

And the whole little world where I sit is a world of plunder and prey

While Wordsworth found a "Holy plan" at work in Nature, Tennyson finds no evidence of God in the objects of Nature. Rather in Nature he hears a voice shouting to him, "believe no more".

In short, Tennyson is a great and original nature poet.

16. "Tennyson shares much more than Browning in the direct prolongation of Romanticism.

Or

The romantic note in the poetry of Tennyson and Browning.

All the great romantic poets had died by the middle of the 19th century, and the greatest of them--Coleridge, Shelley and Keats—much earlier. The rise of science and rationalism did much to cause a disintegration and decay of romantic energies, ideas and ideals. Still, writing about the middle of the century, Tennyson and Browning could not escape being influenced by the romanticism of the previous generation of poets. There is a strong romantic note in their poetry, more so in Tennyson than in Browning. Both of them shared in the prolongation of romanticism, Tennyson more than Browning.

The traditions established by the romantic poets were a love of natural scenes, a vindication of the simpler emotions in song, an interest in remote times and places, an acute sensitivity to beauty, a bent towards the wonderful and mysterious, verging dangerously at times upon the merely surprising and eerie, an introspective lyricism tinged with an all-pervading melancholy, and a certain formlessness in structure and expression.

Browning was deeply influenced by the romantic tradition. He was a great nature poet. He sketched with equal mastery broad landscapes and arresting snatches of momentary vision. But he did not, "always walk, look at nature, and think of human destiny." His view of the plan and function of nature was decidedly singular.

In his records of human emotion he was not only concerned with its dignity, its simplicity, its moral purport, but much more

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with its causes and sources. He was more prone to analyse than to find graceful and rhythmical utterance for it. "Again he ranged over centuries and continents for his subjects, and found them in the Italy of the Renaissance and to-day, the French camp, the Spanish Cloister, Palestine and Russia, just as the pre-Christian era afforded him a Cleon, the Middle Ages a Paracelsus, and the nineteenth century a Blougram" (**T. S. Young**). In this he was one with the romantics but with a difference, "For first, he filled these scenes with accurate and obtrusive detail, woven cunningly as in *Katrshisn* into the fabric of the poem ; this is one of the grounds on which Browning may be called a realist. And secondly, though he was a free citizen of all these kingdoms, States and western islands, they were not simply picturesque scenes, but varying abodes of the personality of men, supremely interesting because they brought into focus some aspect of the mind which no other combination of circumstances ever placed in so clear a light.

It is sometimes denied that he has the keen sensitiveness to beauty of a Keats or a Tennyson. But the criticism cannot be upheld in the face of lines, uttered in a fine, careless rapture, such as these,

The sprinkled islands
Lily on lily, that o'erlace the sea,
And laugh their pride when the light wave lips
"*Greece*"

or these from *Paracelsus*

Day by day
New pollen on the lily petal grows,
And still more labyrinthine buds the rose

Here colour, form and cadence are supremely adequate to the most glorious as to the most delicate imaginative scene. "Nevertheless, a restless mental curiosity did so often tease him from the expression of such visions, and in some later work he lost the secret of the poet's alchemy, which transmutes thought to beauty, recovering it triumphantly, however, in the harvest of his Indian summer in *Asolando*" (**Young**).

He had not much aptitude for the insolubly mysterious. He rarely handled the mystery of enchantment, though he did it with astonishing skill in *Childe Roland* and *The Flight of the Dutches.* In general, he thought things sufficiently wonderful without their being either unprecedented or miraculous. "The mystery of infinity was a challenge and an irritant to him ; his intellect quickly took up a scent and followed hard upon the trail, till the heart of the mystery was plucked" (**Young**).

In lyric he was capable of the graceful impersonal allusiveness of the Elizabethans, of the subtle blending of perfume and memory

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in the manner of Keats and most rarely of the introspective Shelleyon kind" (**Young**). But his dramatic instinct led him much more frequently to probe into the thought and feeling of lovers in situations unique, momentary and intense, the unsuccessful, or the faithless, or the gloriously triumphant. Except in *One Word More*, parts of *By the Fireside* and in the apostrophe "*O : Lyric Love*", he did not give expression to personal sentiment ; in other words, "his lyrics are dramatic and by the same token not necessarily either melancholy or introspective."

If, therefore, we describe him as a romanticist, it must be with many reservations. Shelley and, to a lesser degree, Keats were the only poetical personalities who left any impress upon him. He was too independent and original to be imitative. He scarcely falls under any recognised heading. His overplus of intellect in poetical composition, his dramatic instinct, his analytical tendency made him an intellectual realist rather than a romanticist.

Despite his classical sense of form and classical felicity of expression, the romantic note is much more stronger and more pronounced in the poetry of Tennyson. There were two strains of the romantic movement : the first the more strictly 'romantic', best represented by Coleridge and Keats, with its love of picture and colour, the marvellous or mysterious, the far-away in time or place ; the other, sometimes called naturalistic, of which Wordsworth, writing of the peasant around him, was the great exponent. Tennyson united these two strains more completely than any of his predecessors as in *The Lady of Shalott*, *The Lotos-Eaters*, *Mariana*, *Mort D'Arthur*, etc. Sometimes, he took his subject from the past and modernised it : at other times, he treated of contemporary subjects and problems and threw over them the romantic glow of a by-gone age. The old stories of Arthur's death and of the Sleeping Beauty enchanted him. The story of the exploits of the legendary Greek hero Ulysses inspired him to write two of his most fascinating lyrics *Ulysses* and *The Lotos-Eaters*. Similarly, *Tithonus* is inspired by the Greek legend of the love of goddess Aurora for Tithonus. The romantic love of magic, mystery, and enchantment colours his treatment of the legend of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. A Keats-like sensuousness and eye for colour characterise his nature-painting. The music and melody of poems like *The Lotos-Eaters* reminds one of the haunting music of Coleridge's *Christabel*.

From whatever view we consider, we are forced to conclude that the romantic note is more pure and dominant in the poetry of Tennyson than in that of Browning. It was through him that the influence of Keats and the other romantics was passed on to the Pre-raphealite poets of the next generation. "He shares much more than Browning in the direct prolongation of romanticism."

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32

The Passing of Arthur

That story which the bold Sir Bedivere,
First made and latest left of all the knights,
Told, when the man was no more than a voice
In the white winter of his age, to those
With whom he dwelt, new faces, other minds.

For on their march to westward, Bedivere,
Who slowly paced among the slumbering host,
Heard in his tent the moanings of the King :

'I found Him in the shinning of the stars,
I mark'd Him in the flowering of His fields,
But in His ways with men I find Him not,
I waged His wars, and now I pass and die.
O me ! for why is all around us here
As if some lesser god had made the world,
But had not force to shape it as he would,
Till the High God behold it from beyond,
And enter it, and make it beautiful ?
Or else as if the world were wholly fair,
But that these eyes of men are dense and dim,
And have not power to see it as it is :
Perchance, because we see not to the close ;—
For I, being simple, thought to work His will,
And have but stricken with the sword in vain ;
And all whereon I lean'd in wife and friend
Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm
Reels back into the beast, and is no more.
My God, thou hast forgotten me in my death :
Nay—God my Christ—I pass but shall not die.'

Then, ere that last weird battle in the west,
There came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain kill'd
In Lancelot's war, the ghost of Gawain blown
Along a wandering wind, and past his ear
Went shrilling, 'Hollow, hollow all delight !
Hail, King ! to-morrow thou shalt pass away.
Farewell ! there is an isle of rest for thee.

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And I am blown along a wandering wind,
And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight.'
And fainter onward, like wild birds that change
Their season in the night and wail their way
From cloud to cloud, down the long wind the dream
Shrill'd ; but in going mingled with dim cries
Far in the moonlit haze among the hills,
As of some lonely city sack'd by night,
When all is lost, and wife and child with wail
Pass to new lords ; and Arthur woke and call'd,
'Who spake ? A dream. O light upon the wind,
Thine, Gawain, was the voice—are these dim cries
Thine ? or doth all that haunts the waste and wild
Mourn, knowing it will go along with me ?'

This heard the bold Sir Bedivere and spake :
'O me, my King, let pass whatever will,
Elves, and the harmless glamour of the field ;
But in their stead thy name and glory cling
To all high places like a golden cloud
For ever : but as yet thou shalt not pass.
Light was Gawain in life, and light in death
Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man ;
And care not thou for dreams from him, but rise—
I hear the steps of Modred in the west,
And with him many of thy people, and knights
Once thine, whom thou hast loved, but grosser grown
Than heathen, spitting at their vows and thee.
Right well in heart they know thee for the King.
Arise, go forth and conquer as of old.'

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :
'For other is this battle in the west
Whereto we move, than when we strove in youth,
And brake the petty kings, and fought with Rome,
O thrust the heathen from the Roman wall,
And shook him thro' the north. Ill doom is mine
To war against my people and my knights.
The king who fights his people fights himself.
And they my knights, who loved me once, the stroke
That strikes them dead is as my death to me.
Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way
Thro' this blind haze, which ever since I saw
One lying in the dust at Almesbury,
Hath folded in the passes of the world.'

Then rose the King and moved his host by night,
And ever push'd Sir Modred, league by league,
Back to the sunset bound of Lyonesse—
A land of old upheaven from the abyss
By fire, to sink into the abyss again ;
Where fragments of forgotten peoples dwelt,

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And the long mountains ended in a coast
Of ever-shifting sand, and far away
The phantom circle of a moaning sea.
There the pursuer could pursue no more,
And he that fled could no further fly the King ;
And there, that day when the great light of heaven
Burn'd at his lowest in the rolling year,
On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed.
Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight
Like this last, dim, weird battle of the west.
A deathwhite mist slept over sand and sea :
Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew
Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold
With formless fear ; and ev'n on Arthur fell
Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought.
For friend and foe were shadows in the mist,
And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew ;
And some had visions out of golden youth,
And some behold the faces of old ghosts
Look in upon the battle ; and in the mist
Was many a noble dead, many a base,
And chance and craft and strength in single fights,
And ever and anon with host to host
Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn,
Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash
Of battleaxes, on shatter'd helms, and shrieks
After the Christ, of those who falling down
Look'd up for heaven, and only saw the mist ;
And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,
Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,
Sweat, writhings, anguish, labouring of the lungs
In that close mist, and cryings for the light,
Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.

Last, as by some one deathbed after wail
Of suffering, silence follows, or thro' death
Or deathlike swoon, thus over all that shore,
Save for some whisper of the seething seas.
A dead hush fell ; but when the dolorous day
Grew drearier toward twilight falling, came
A bitter wind, clear from the North, and below
The mist aside, and with that wind the tide
Rose, and the pale King glanced across the field
Of battle : but no man was moving there ;
Nor any cry of Christian heard thereon,
Nor yet of heathen ; only the wan wave
Brake in among dead faces, to and fro
Swaying the helpless hands, and up and down
Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen,
And shiver'd brands that once had fought with Rome,

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And rolling far along the gloomy shores
The voice of days of old and days to be.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere,
And whiter than the mist that all day long
Had held the field of battle was the King :

'Hearest thou this great voice that shakes the world,
And wastes the narrow realm whereon we move,
And beats upon the faces of the dead,
My dead, as ho' they had not died for me ?—
O Bedivere, for on my heart hath fall'n
Confusion, till I know not what I am,
Nor whence I am, nor whether I be King.
Behold, I seem but King among the dead.'

Then spake the bold Sir Bedivere : 'My King,
King everywhere ! and so the dead have kings,
There also will I worship thee as King.
Yet still thy life is whole, and still I live
Who love thee ; but who hates thee, he that brought
The heathen back among us, yonder stands,
Modred, unharm'd, the traitor of thine house.'

Then spake the King : 'My house hath been my doom.
But call not thou this traitor of my house
Who hath but dwelt beneath one roof with me.
My house are rather they who sware my vows,
Yea, even while they brake them, own'd me King.
And well for thee, saying in my dark hour,
When all the purport of my throne hath fail'd,
That quick or dead thou holdest me for king.
King am I, whatsoever be their cry ;
And one last act of kinghood shalt thou see
Yet, ere I pass.' And uttering this the King
Made at the man : then Modred smote his liege
Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword
Had beaten thin ; while Arthur at one blow,
Striking the last stroke with Excalibar,
Slew him, and all but slain himself, he fell.

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd
Among the mountains by the winter sea ;
Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,
Had fall'n in Lyonnesse about their lord,
King Arthur. Then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land :
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

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Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :
'The sequel of to-day unsolders all
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep
They sleep—the men I loved. I think that we
Shall never more, at any future time,
Delight ourselves with talk of knightly deeds,
Walking about the gardens and the halls
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.
I perish by this people which I made,—
Tho' Merlin sware that I should come again
To rule once more ; but, let what will be, be,
I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm
That without help I cannot last till morn.
Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,
Which was my pride : for thou rememberest how
In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
Holding the sword—and how I row'd across
And took it, and have worn it, like a king ;
And, wheresoever I am sung or told
In aftertime, this also shall be known :
But now delay not : take Excalibur,
And fling him far into the middle mere :
Watch what thou seest, and lightly bridg me word.'

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere :
It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,
Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm—
A little thing may harm a wounded man ;
Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word.'

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept,
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
By zigzag paths, and jults of pointed rock,
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt :
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long
That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,
This way and that diving the swift mind,

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In act to throw : but at the last it seem'd
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd
There in the many-knotted waterflags,
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.
So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :
'Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave ?
What is it thou hast seen ? or what hast heard ?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :
'I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag.'

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale :
'Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,
Not rendering true answer, as beseem'd
Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight :
For surer sign had follow'd, either hand,
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again,
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing
I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word.'

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,
Counting the dewy pebbles, fix'd in thought ;
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote
His palms together, and he cried aloud :

'And if indeed I cast the brand away,
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men,
What good should follow this, if this were done ?
What harm, undone ? Deep harm to disobey,
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.
Were it well to obey then, if a king demand
An act unprofitable, against himself ?
The King is sick, and knows not what he does.
What record, or what relic of my lord
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
And rumours of a doubt ? But were this kept,
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,
Some one might show it a joust of arms,
Saying, "King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,
Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
Upon the hidden bases of the hills."
So might some old man speak in the aftertime
To all the people, winning reverence.

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But now much honour and much fame were lost.'

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,
And hid Excalibur the second time,
And so storde back slow to the wounded King.

Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily :
'What is it thou hast seen ? or what hast heard ?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :
'I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds.'

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath :
'Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,
Unknightly, traitor-hearted ! Woe is me !
Authority forgets a dying king,
Laid widow'd of the power in his eye
That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,
For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,
In whom should meet the offices of all,
Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt ;
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence :
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
I will arise and slay thee with my hands.'

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
Among the bulrush beds, and clutch'd the sword,
And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.
So flash'd and feel the brand Excalibur :
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.
And lightly went the other to the King.

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath :
'Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.
Speak out : what is it thou hast heard, or seen ?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :
'Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men,
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.

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Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him ;
But when I look'd again, behold an arm,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew nim under in the mere.'

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard :
'My end draws nigh ; 'tis time that I were gone.
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,
And bear me to the margin ; yet I fear
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die.'

So saying, from the pavement he half rose,
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere
Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,
And would have spoken, but he found not words ;
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,
And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs.

But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the King,
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, 'Quick, quick !
I fear it is too late, and I shall die.'
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd,
Larger than human on the frozen hills.
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.
Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels—
And on a sudden, lo ! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them ; and descending they were ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms,
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these
Three Queens with crowns of gold : and from them rose
A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmur'd Arthur, 'Place me in the barge.'

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So to the barge they came. There those three Queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she, that rose the tallest of them all
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands,
And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,
And dropping bitter tears against a brow
Striped with dark blood : for all his face was white
And colourless, and like the wither'd moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east ;
And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops
Of onset ; and the light and lustrous curls—
That made his forehead like a rising sun
High from the dais-throne—were parch'd with dust ;
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,
Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
So like a shatter'd column lay the King ;
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere :
'Ah ! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go ?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes ?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have been not since the light that led
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
But now the whole Round Table is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world,
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds.'

And slowly answer'd Arthur from the barge :
'The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
Comfort thyself : what comfort is in me ?
I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within himself make pure ! but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend ?

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For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seest—if indeed I go
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)—
To the island-valley of Avilion ;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly ; but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.'

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away.

But when that moan had past for evermore,
The stillness of the dead world's winter dawn
Amazed him, and he groan'd, 'The King is gone.'
And therewithal came on him the weird rhyme,
'From the great deep to the great deep he goes.'

Whereat he slowly turn'd and slowly clomb
The last hard footstep of that iron crag ;
Thence mark'd the black hull moving yet, and cried,
'He passes to be King among the dead,
And after healing of his grievous wound
He comes again ; but—if he come no more—
O me, be yon dark Queens in yon black boat,
Who shriek'd and wail'd, the three whereat we gazed
On that high day, when, clothed with living light,
They stood before his throne in silence, friends
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need ?'

Then from the dawn it seem'd there came, but faint
As from beyond the limit of the world,
Like the last echo born of a great cry,
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice
Around a king returning from his wars.

Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb
Ev'n to the highest he could climb, and saw,
Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,
Or thought he saw, the speck, that bere the Ring,
Down that long water opening on the deep
Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go
From less to less and vanish into light.
And the new sun rose bringing the new year.

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The Passing of Arthur

(a) Critical and Explanatory Comments

Lines 1-5 : Substance

The story of the death of King Arthur was narrated by Sir Bedivere to new and unknown people among whom he had been living. Sir Bedivere was the first to be made a knight by King Arthur, and he was the last to die. He narrated the story in his old age, at the moment of death, when he had grown weak and helpless, a mere voice so to say.

Passing—death.

The story—the story of the last days and death of King Arthur.

First made—he was made a knight first of all. *Latest left*—last to die. *Of all the knights*—of all the knights of the Round Table of King Arthur.

No more than a voice—when he was so weak that he seemed to be a mere speaking voice.

White winter of his age—old age when his hair had grown white like snow.

Other minds—people of a different nature. Their views were entirely different.

Lines 6-28

The story of the death of Arthur begins with line six. One night their army marched towards the west against their enemy Modred. When at night the soldiers were sleeping Sir Bedivere walked slowly through the camp. At that time, he heard a sound of moaning coming from the tent of King Arthur.

He heard King Arthur lamenting that he could find God in the shining stars and in the flowering field. But he could not find him in the life of Man. God could not influence the actions of men ; it was as if He did not live with them. That is why there was such treachery

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and ingratitude in the world. His own queen had been unfaithful to him, and his dear friend on whom he relied so much, and in whom he had such confidence had corrupted and seduced his Queen. This showed that there was no God to prevent such wickedness. All his life he had faught for God and religion, but it was all in vain. God had forgotten him, and deserted him. He was the victim of treachery and ingratitude and his kingdom had been laid waste. But still he is sure that though he may pass away for the moment, but in reality he will not die. He is confident that he would again come back to earth at some more and auspicious time.

For—the story now begins with 'for', as if the following facts were the reasons for Bedivere's telling his story.

Slowly paced—walked with slow steps. *Slumbering host*—the sleeping army or soldiers.

Heard—overhead. *Moaning*—lamentation.

I found Him—find Him not—"Arthur cannot understand why the glory and power of god should be so clearly manifested in the works of nature, in the visible beauty of heaven and earth, while His dealings with mankind are full of mystery. Arthur had fought in God's cause and founded the Round Table for "love of God and man" : was he now to die amid the ruins of his own work ? ('Rowe')

I waged his wars—I fought for God and his religion.

For why . . . here—everything appears to be so strange, and imperfect.

Lesser—smaller.

But . . . he would—could not make it as beautiful, as it should be due to want of power and skill.

High God—Supreme God.

Or else—otherwise. *As if*—it seems as if.

Dense and dim—short-sighted, unable to see clearly.

Perchance—perhaps. *Because . . . close*—we are not intelligent enough to see the end of things.

Stricken—struck with the sword ; fought.

Leaned—depended fully. *Wife and friend*—Queen Guinevere and her guilty lover, Launcelot, a friend and knight of King Arthur.

Is . . . peace—have turned a traitor to me and spoiled my peace of mind.

Reels . . . beast—becomes a jungle fit only to be inhabited by beasts and savages.

My God etc.—this is the cry of despair which comes out of the heart of King Arthur. It shows his intense spiritual agony.

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I pass but shall not die—King Arthur has full faith in the prophecy of Merlin that he shall only pass away from this world to come back again to rule over a more cultured and civilized world. He is not dying, but leaving the earth for a short while.

Lines 29-49 : Substance

Now, before that tragic, ominous last battle took place in the west, the ghost of Sir Gawain came to the tent where King Arthur was sleeping. He had been killed in the war against the treacherous Sir Launcelot. King Arthur heard his voice, as if it had been blown there by the wind. The ghostly voice told Arthur shrilly that he would pass away the next day, but would live in a comfortable island and have rest there. He himself would go about wandering restlessly. His voice became fainter and fainter as it came to Arthur with the wind mixed with other voices. It was as if death and destruction had overtaken some city and women and children were crying at the moment of their death. Arthur woke up from his sleep. He wandered if that wierd voice was really that of Gawain or of spirits that haunt waste lands and jungles. Were all these voices mourning his sad fate, knowing that he will die the next day ?

Last—it was the last battle of King Arthur's life, *Weird*—strange ; ominous.

Gawain—a faithful knight, who was killed in the battle between Launcelot and King Arthur.

Shrilling—shrieking in a shrill voice.

Isle of rest—the island—valley of Avilion.

Like wild bird . . . way—like wild birds, who change their abode with the change of season and cry shrilly when going on their way.

Wail their way—fly with a cry, as if they are in pain.

The dream—the ghost of Sir Gawain.

Haze —fog or mist only dimly lighted by the light of the Moon.

As of—as if coming from. *Sacked by night*—being robbed and destroyed in the night.

With wail—crying mournfully ; with cries of grief. *Pass to new lords*—die and go away to new husbands and new fathers in life to come.

Dim—indistinct, vague, not fully recognised.

All that—all the spirits that.

The waste and wild—deserted and lonely places. *It*—all those spirits. *Go along with me*—will pass and go with me to the great unknown.

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Lines 50-64 : Substance

Bold Sir Bedivere heard the words of King Arthur and told him not to care about elves or fairies or such other harmless creature of the fields and forests. Late him leave such thoughts, but rather think of the glory and name and fame that will be yours and that will be hung for ever in the clouds like a golden trophy if you win this battle against Modred. You will not die. Gawain was light-hearted in life and so he is in death. Much weight should not be attached to what he says, for his words are as unsubstantial as dreams. He should rather prepare himself for the battle to be fought with Modred in the west. Many of your people and your knights have joined him. Once they were yours, and now they are his. You loved them, but they have proved to be more wicked and unkind than even non-Christians. They have proved false to their vows and to you. In their hearts of hearts they still know that you are the real king, but do not heave the courage to say so. Therefore, get ready to go to the West to conquer this new enemy Modred, as you did others in the past.

Let pass whatever will—Bedivere is of an entirely practical nature and he has no faith in fairies, elves, ghosts and such other harmless creatures. He is concerned with the more immediate danger from Modred and his followers.

Light . . . death—Gawain was a light-hearted man unworthy of serious regard during his lifetime and so also he is in death. It is useless to put any faith in the prophecy of his ghost.

Modred—brother of Gawain, who had revolted against King Arthur and crowned himself king.

Grosser grown than heathen—became of a more wicked nature than non-Christians. *Spitting*—broke ; proved false to.

Cling—stick to ; be hung from the clouds like a golden trophy, the symbol and sign of your victory.

Dreams—unsubstantial and unreal prophecies.

Grosser—more wicked.

Spitting—scorning ; violating scornfully.

Lines 65-78 : Substance

King Arthur then told Sir Bedivere that this battle was far different from the other battles they fought against the petty kings or against the army of Rome or when they threw back the heathens from the Roman wall to the northern waste lands. It was unfortunate that he had now to fight against his own people and the very knights who ones loved him so well. The death of these knights was as sorrowful for him as his own death He asked Bedivere to go with him and find a way out of the dark mist which has filled the world since he saw his queen, Guinevere, lying in the dust in the convent of Almesbury.

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Far other—entirely different.

Strove—fought.

Broke—defeated ; conquered.

Thurst—pushed out ; threw out.

Shook him into the North—threw out the Heathens from Rome and forced them to take shelter in the snowy wild places of the North.

Heathen—pagans i.e., non-Christians. *The Roman Wall*—"Agricola drew a line of military stations across the space about 40 miles in length, between the Fifth of Forth and the Clyde ; in the reign of Antonious Pius this line was afterwards fortified by a rampart, erected on foundations of stone. The Empereor Hadrian caused a rampart of earth to be erected between Newcastle and Carlisile, and Septimus Severus had a stone wall built parallel to Hadrian's rampart and in the same locality. Considerable traces of these walls may still be seen." **(Rowe).**

Ill Doom—bad luck.

One lying . . . Almesbury—the repentant Queen Guinevere.

Folded—thoroughly covered. *Hath . . . world*—had covered his mind with confusion and despair, so that he cannot see his way clearly through the world. *Passes*—paths ; gates.

Lines 79-117 : Substance

Having spoken these words the king rose and in the night marched with his armies towards the west. He pushed Sir Modred, mile by mile, towards Lyonesse, which is situated at the end of the land, is bound only by the horizon i.e. beyond which there is no land, but only the sea having the distant horizon as its boundary. It is a land which had once come out of the sea through a volcanic eruption and was fated to sink down in the sea again, and here Modred took his stand for he could retreat no more, as he had reached the sea. It was now mid-winter and here the two armies clashed with each other.

King Arthur had never fought such a battle before. A heavy mist spread over the land and no distinction could be made between friend or foe. Both the armies were confused in this mist and fought furiously in the dark. Many noble people, and many base people were killed. Spears were broken, armours were cut into pieces, shields broke as swords clashed. There was also the crash of battle-axes. As warriors fell down they cried aloud to Christ to save them. There were shouts of heathen and treacherous knights. There was loud swearing, use of abusive, dirty language, and blasphemy. Soldiers writhed in pain as they died. Some cried for light as they could not see clearly in the mist which covered the scene. There was moaning

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and crying alround, and even the dead seemed to speak. It was all a scene of confusion worse-confounded.

Sunset bound—the land's end, Lyonesse, a mythical country to the south and west of Cornwall. In the very early ages, England was connected with the continent of Europe by land, having the horizon as its boundary.

A land, again—a land which had risen from the sea due to a volcanic eruption and destined to go down under the sea due to the same cause.

Phantom circle—the distant horizon which seemed to bound the sea.

Pursuer—King Arthur.

He that fled—Modred.

When the . . . rolling year—in the winter when the day is shortest.

Closed—began to fight.

Dim—because of the blinding haze.

Death white—white like death. *Steept over*—covered completely.

Visions . . . golden youth—visions of the other noble battles fought in their youth.

Old Ghosts—ghosts of friends slain in earlier battles.

Ever and anon—again and again.

Splintering—breaking into small pieces. *Mail*—armour.

Brands—swords.

Monstrous blasphemies—wicked words against God and the Saints.

Moans . . . the dead—groans of the dead and dying. This line further heightens the weird atmosphere.

Lines 118-133 : Substance

At last the battle ended and there was total silence. It was as deep a silence as follows the death of some single individual after terrible suffering. A similar death-like silence fell over the scene. It was broken only by the deep roar of the waves of the sea. As night approached that dark and dismal scene became still more drear and ominous. Then a bitterly cold wind began to blow from the north, and it cleared the dark mist and fog, so that the desolate scene could be seen clearly. With the blowing of the wind the tide also rose. The king now saw that no man at all moved there, nor was there to be heard the voice of any man, Christian or Heathen. Only

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the pale waves of the sea fell upon the dead and tossed this way and that way their helpless hands, their empty helmets and their broken swords with which they had once fought against the Romans. Thus waves had rolled in this very way in the distant past, and they will roll in this very way in the times to come also. The sea is eternal, while man's stay on earth is short and fleeting.

A dead hush—complete silence. *Dolorous*—sorrowful.

Wan pale—colourless.

Hollow helme—helmets which had fallen off from the heads of the dead knights.

And shivered . . , Rome—broken swords of knights who had once fought against the mighty Romans.

The voice . . . days to be—the ocean, a symbol of time, and eternity. *Days to come*—i.e. the future.

Lines 136—146 : Substance

The King looked even more pale than the mist which had enveloped the field of battle all the day. He now said to Sir Bedivere to mark the roar of the sea-waves which shakes the land and which eats into the small island on which they live. It strikes at the faces of his dead soldiers. They are his and it seems to him that they have died fighting for him. A great confusion has fallen over his heart and he does not know who he is, from where he has come, and whether he is the king or not. But even if he is the king, he is the king of the dead, for all his people are lying dead around him.

Held—enveloped.

This great voice—the roar of the sea-waves. *Wastes*—eats away. *The narrow realm*—the small island, England, which is his kingdom.

Lines 147-153 : Substance

Bold Sir Bedivere then replied to the King and assured him that he would be his king even after death, as he was in life. After death also he will worship him as his King. But he was still alive, and he, too, still lived and loved him. Modred the traitor of his own family, was also alive, and stood there in front of him. It was that wicked and treacherous Modred who had called back the heathens to fight against him. He still was unharmed (and so the king should fight him and kill him also.

Thy life is whole—you are still living.

Yonder stands—stands there in front of you,

Lines 154-169 : Substance

King Arthur then replied to Sir Bedivere. He told him that his family had certainly brought him to ruin but Modred did not

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belong to his family. Only he lived in the same house with him. His family rather consisted of those knights who had vowed obedience to him and it was well for him that even in this dark hour, when his throne had lost all its power and significance, Bedivere still owned him as his king. He would still remain a king; whatever anybody else might say. He will do one last act of Knighthood before his death. Saying this he attacked Modred. Modred struck hard at his helmet which had become thin as a result of being struck by heathen swords. King Arthur slew Modred with one blow of his famous sword, Excalibur. But he himself was also nearly killed and fell down to the ground.

My house—the members of my family.

Swore my vows—swore that they would always be loyal to me.

They broke them—broke the oath of loyalty that they had sworn.

Owned me king—acknowledged that I am the king.

Dark hour—time of misfortune.

Purport—significance ; power.

Quick—living.

Made at—attacked.

Smote—struck. *His leige*—his king. *Excalibur*—the reputed sword of king Arthur. It was supposed to be invincible as Merlin, the famous magician, had cast a magic spell on it. It thus had magical qualities.

(Note : For lines 170-440 students should see Chapter 19, "Morte D'e Arthur". "Mort" means 'death' or 'passing away').

Lines 441-445 : Substance

When the sound of wailing and lamentation had died out, the stillness of the winter morning amazed Sir Bedivere who cried out that the king was gone. And then he was reminded of the weired words of Merlin, "from the great deep to the great deep he goes", i.e. the King who had come out of the ocean now again goes to the ocean.

Moan—lamentation ; weeping and crying. *Past*—ended.

Stillness—deep silence. *Come on him*—Sir Bedivere was reminded of. *Wierd rhyme*—the strange, mysterious words spoken by Merlin, the magician.

Deep—ocean.

Lines 446-456 : Substance

Sir Bedivere now slowly turned and climbed to the top of the hill and saw the black ship moving away in the distance. He cried

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out that King Arthur was going to be the king among the dead and that he would come back to the earth again after his serious wound was healed. But even if he came no more which would be very sad—the three queens in the black boat, the three who stood near his throne in silence, when he was crowned the king—would help him and take care of him.

Clomb—climbed.

Iron crag—rock, hard as iron.

Hull—ship. *Marked*—saw.

Passes—goes. *O me*—it will really be sad for me ; I will be heart-broken.

High—great. *Living light*—bright, dazzling light.

Lines 457-461 : Substance

In the morning, there were heard faint voices, so faint that they seemed to come from the end of the world. They seemed to be the echo of a number of voices comingout of some beautiful city and welcoming their king on his return home from some glorious battle.

From the dawn—in the morning.

Were one voice—with one voice ; all together.

Lines 462-469 : Substance

Hearing this faint cry. Sir Bedivere climed to the highest point of the rocks that he could climb. He formed an arch of his hand, and through it tried to see upto the longest distance possible. He saw, or he thought he saw, a speck moving about at a distance, and growing he thought he saw; a speck moving about at a distance and growing smaller and smaller as it moved. It was the ship carrying away the king. At last it vanished into the light of the sun.

The new sun now rose in the sky bringing in a new year. (*The all order had ended with Arthur, and the new was born with the new 'Sun'. That is the law of Nature.*)

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34

To Virgil

(*a*) THE POEM

Roman Virgil, thou that singest
Ilion's lofty temples robed in fire,
Ilion falling, Rome arising,
wars, and filial faith, and Dido's pyre :

Landscape-lover, lord of language
more than he that sang the Works and Days,
All the chosen coin of fancy
flashing out from many a golden phrase ;

Thou that singest wheat and woodland,
tilth and vineyard, hive and horse and herd ;
All the charm of all the Muses
often flowering in a lonely word ;

Poet of the happy Tityrus
piping underneath his beechen bowers ;
Poet of the poet-satyr
whom the laughing shepherd bound with flowers ;

Chanter of the Pollio, glorying
in the blissful years again to be,
Summers of the snakeless meadow,
unlaborious earth and oarless sea ;

Thou that seest Universal
Nature moved by Universal Mind ;
Thou majestic in thy sadness
at the doubtful doom of human kind ;

Light among the vanish'd ages ;
star that gildest yet this phantom shore ;
Golden branch amid the shadows,
kings and realms that pass to rise no more :

Now thy Forum roars no longer,
fallen every purple Caesar's dome—

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Tho' thine ocean-roll of rhythm
sound for ever of Imperial Rome—

Now the Rome of slaves hath perish'd,
and the Rome of freemen holds her place,
I, from out the Northern Island
sunder'd once from all the human race,

I salute thee, Mantovano,
I that loved thee since my day began,
Wielder of the stateliest measure
ever moulded by the lips of man.

(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION—CRITICAL SUMMARY

Introduction

Tennyson's well known lyric *Virgil* was written in 1882, at the request of Mantuans (lovers of Virgil) for the nineteenth centenary of Virgil's death. This is the poet's homage to the great Roman poet Virgil, who lived and wrote nineteen hundred years ago, and is regarded as the greatest poet of ancient Rome.

Development of Thought

Tennyson begins the lyric by referring to Virgil's immortal epic *Aenied*, in which Virgil has celebrated the exploits of the great hero Aenies, supposed to be the ancestor of the ancient Romans. Virgil has narrated how Aeneas fought bravely during the ten years war of Troy in which the city of Troy with its splended buildings was reduced to ashes. On his return journey, he had many adventures. He reached Carthage, and the Queen of Carthage, Dido, fell violently in love with him. When Aeneas left Carthage, Dido committed suicide by burning. Tennyson admires Virgil for the interesting and inspiring story of true love and war-like exploits which he has told.

Tennyson admires him for his command over language, and for beautiful passage of nature-description which abound in his poetry. He had imaginative gift of a high order. Indeed, in this respect he is superior even to the great poet Hesoid. His powers of imagination are seen in many golden phrases that he coined.

Indeed, Virgil was a versatile poet in whom are to be found united the various poetic qualities which are found separately in separate poets. He was not only a great epic poet, but also a great pastoral poet. He sings of the loves, joys and sorrows of simple people like shepherds, farmers, etc., who lead their humble lives in the lap of mother nature. He represents shepherds playing on their pipes, and satyrs dancing and singing cheerfully in the forests. Every rural activity finds a place in his poetry. Cornfields, woods, vineyards, a hive, horse and herd, are all described by him. All can find something or the other in his poetry to their taste.

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Virgil had wisdom enough to realize that all creation is one, and that it is ruled by one power, the Supreme. He could realize this truth even though he lived in a pagan age. Virgil had a clear idea of the sorrow and suffering which is the fate of man on this earth, and this makes his poetry pessimistic and melancholy in tone. But whether the mood is serious or gay, Virgil is always majestic and sublime.

Virgil's poetry is immortal. It shines brightly through the darkness of time, and illuminates the darkness—decay and decline—which envelops poetry in the modern age. Majestic and stately buildings of Rome stand no more, but the "Ocean-roll" of his rhythm continue to shine even today after a lapse of nearly two thousand years. Ancient Rome with its traditions and customs such as the custom of slavery has perished, but Virgil lives on even today. He is an immortal poet, the poet who has used the majestic Hexametre most effectively, and so the poet admires him, and pays his humble homage to him in the form of this lyric.

Salient Features

The lyric is the tribute of one great poet to another even greater, one who has always been a source of inspiration to him. Written in stanzas of four lines each, the lyric is remarkable for its simplicity and clarity. Tennyson has used a number of effective similes to convey an idea of the glory and greatness of Virgil. In stanza VII we get an instance of Homeric or long-tailed simile. Just as Aenies, Virgil's hero, carried a bough of golden light which illuminated the darkness of the underworld, so also Virgil shines through the darkness of time. He is also compared to a golden star which sheds its golden light on this dark planet of ours. In short, the lyric is a work of art, from the pen of a great artist with words.

(c) CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY COMMENTS

Stanza 1

Roman Virgil—the great Roman poet Virgil, known for his epic *Aenied* which narrates the story of the adventures of Aenies, the hero of the Trojan war. *Thou that singest*—Virgil who in his epic sings of the greatness and glory of Aenies, who fought in the ten years war of Troy, and ultimately defeated the Trojans, and burnt Troy. *Ilion*—another name for Troy ; of Troy. *Lofty*—high ; grand, majestic. *Robed in fire*—burning, enveloped in fire. The Trojans were defeated and their city burnt. *Ilion falling*—Trojans were defeated and Troy was burnt. *Rome arising*—according to Virgil Rome was founded by Aenies on his way back to Greece from the Trojan war. Thus, Rome rose as Troy fell. *Filial faith*– a child's duty towards his parents : Virgil sings of the love and affection of Aenies for his father, how he saved his life in the war of Troy at great risk to his own self. *Dido's pyre*—Virgil also sings of the love of Dido, the Queen of Carthage, for Aenies. While returning from the war, Aenies reached Carthage, a city on the north coast of

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Africa at the point where Europe and Africa are separated by a narrow strait, now called the Strait of Gibraltar. Dido fell in love with Aenies at first sight. When he left Carthage, she was heart-broken and she burnt herself. Hence the expression "Dido's pyre", *i.e.* the pyre on which Dido burnt herself.

Stanza 2

Landscape-lover—Virgil was a great lover of natural beauty. *Lord of language*—master of language ; Virgil had full command over the Latin tongue. *He that sang ....days*—the reference is to the great Greek poet Hesiod. Virgil had greater command over language than Hesiod. *Chosen coin of fancy*—Virgil loved the coin or wealth of imagination more than anything else. *Fancy*—imagination. *Flashing out*—shining brightly. *Flashing out.....phrase*—Virgil's powers of imagination are best reflected in the beautiful phrases he has used.

Stanza 3

Woodland—forests. *Tilth*—farmer's work, or the fields cultivated by him. *Herd*—groups of cattle. *Muses*—nine goddesses of learning in classical mythology. *All the...Muses*—In Virgil's poetry are united all the different poetic beauties which are found separately in other poets. One poet has one kind of beauty, another poet a different one. Virgil was the only poet in whom all these different poetic beauties were combined. *Flawering*—coming to full bloom ; find a perfect expression. *Lonely word*—in one word.

Explanation : Thou that singest . . . . lonely word.

Reference here is to Virgil's pastoral poetry. Pastoral poetry is the poetry which sings of the life of farmers, shepherds, etc. It sings of their love, their joys and sorrows. Virgil's *Eclogues* is a pastoral poem. It shows his love of natural beauty, and the beauty of humble people living in nature. In it Virgil has described the beauty of fields and forests, and has written of the simple joys and sorrows of farmers who cultivate fields, grow crops, keep bees for honey. His pastoral poetry unites different poetic beauties. These beauties find perfect expression in his art.

Stanza 4

Tityrus—name of a shepherd in Virgil's *Eclogues*. He was successful in his love, and hence happy. *Piping*—playing upon his pipe or flute. Shepherds in pastoral poetry were often shown playing on their "oaten-pipes". *Beechen*—of, or similar to, the beech tree, a kind of shady tree. *Bower*—a resting place under a cluster of shady trees. *Poet of the . . . . with flowers*—the reference is to an episode narrated by Virgil in *the Eclogues*. There was a satyr (forest god) who was fond of poetry. Tityrus, just for fun, tied him with a string covered with flowers, making it look like garland. *Satyr*—in classical mythology, they were forest-gods, half-man, half-goat.

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Stanza 5

Chanter—singer, one who sang in honour of. *Pollio*—a patron of Virgil. *Glorying*—finding joy in the thought of. *In the blissful. . .be*—that the happy past would return once again ; that there would again be a golden age in times to come. *Summer of . . . meadow*—when the meadows would be beautiful in the summer season, and there would be no danger of snakes ; that is, when life will again be happy and pleasant, and there will be no sorrow and suffering, and hidden misfortunes as at present. *Unlaborios earth*—when man will not have to work hard, as farmers do at present on their fields. *Oarless sea*—seas without oars ; sailors will not have to work hard on the sea.

Stanza 6

Universal nature—Virgil knew that all nature is one. *Moved*—governed, ruled. *Universal Mind*—by God, the Creator, who is one and who rules over all creation. *Majestic*—grand, stately. *In thy sadness*—when writing on a sad theme. *Doubtful*—uncertain. *Doom*—fate. *At the doubtful . . . . kind*—man's future is uncertain. Nobody knows what sorrow and suffering lie in store for him. This thought made Virgil sad. But he was grand and sublime even when the theme was sad.

Stanza 7

Vanished ages—the ages that are now no more ; the past. *Light among . . . . ages*—through the darkness of time, Virgil shines like a star with golden light. *Star*—Virgil is being compared to a bright star. *Gildest*—makes golden, bright and beautiful. *This phantom shore*—the dark shore of this earth of ours. *Phantom*—dark. *Golden branch amid the shadows*—the reference to the descent of Aenies, into the underworld. He went there with a golden branch, shining brightly, and so could see his way through the darkness of the underworld. The whole episode forms a part of Virgil's epic. *Realms*—countries. *Kings and realms. . . .more*—the reference is to the various countries and their kings, through which Aeneas passed during the course of his journey. They were regions of the dead, of those who live no more in this world.

Explanation : Light among the . . . . rise no more

In his well-known epic *Aenied*, Virgil has narrated the story of the journey of Aeneas, the hero, to the underworld. He won there with a golden branch shining brightly, and this illuminated the darkness of the underworld. In this way he could move through the dark realms of the dead. In the same way, Virgil's poetry shines like a bright star of golden light through the darkness of time. His poetry is like a golden star which illuminates the darkness of ignorance which surrounds the earth, and makes glorious poetry possible in the modern age.

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Stanza 8

Thy Forum—courts of law or market-place, specially of Rome ; a raised platform in the market-place from where the Romans delivered their public speeches. *Purple*—blood-stained ; murderous. *Dome*—big building erected by the Ceasars (kings) of Rome. These buildings have decayed and fallen down with the passage of time. *Thine*—of Virgil. *Ocean-roll of rhythm*—grand and stately epic, which sweeps forward resounding like the rolling waves of the ocean. *Imperial*—majestic. *Sound for ever ..... Rome*—still tells of the greatness and glory of ancient Rome. Big buildings erected by the Roman Ceasars have perished, but Virgil's epic still lives. It still tells us of might of ancient Rome.

Stanza 9

Rome of slaves—Ancient Rome in which slavery was lawful. *Rome of freedom*—modern Rome in which all men are free, none is a slave. *Holds her place*—has taken the place. *The Northern Island*—England. *Sundere'd*—separated, isolated. *From all the human race*—from all other countries of the world.

Stanza 10

I salute thee—the poet pays his homage to Virgil. The poet sings this song in honour of the great epic poet. *Mantovano*—Virgil. *Since my day began*—from my very childhood. *Day*—life. *Wielder*—one who has used. *The stateliest measure*—the majestic hexametre which Virgil has used for his epic. *Measure*—metre. *Moulded*—shaped, used for poetry.

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Chronology

1809. August 6, Born in Somersby Rectory, Lincolnshire.
1827. '*Poem by Two Brothers*'.
1728. Goes to Trinity College, Cambridge.
1829. Hallam went to Trinity College, Cambridge.
1830. '*Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*'.
Journey through France to the Pyrenees.
1831. February. Left Cambridge.
March. Death of his father.
1832. Hallam left Cambridge for Licoln's Inn.
Tour on the Rhine.
'*Poems*', including '*O Enone*' and *The Lotos Eaters*'.
1833. September 15, Hallam died.
1837. Moved to High Beech. Epping Forest.
1842. '*Poems*', including the '*Morte D' Arthur*, and '*Locksley Hall*'.
1845. Accepted a pension from Sir Robert Peel.
1847. '*The Princess*'.
1850. '*In Memoriam.*'
Married Emily Sellwood.
Became Poet Laureate.
1851. First son died at birth.
1852. Second son, Hallam Tennyson, born.
1853. Settled at Farringford, Isle of Wight.
1854. Third son, Lionel Tennyson, born.
'*The Charge of the Light Brigade*'.
1855. '*Maud*'.
1859. '*Idylls of the King*'.
1864. '*Poems*', including '*Enoch Arden*' and '*The Northern Farmer*' : '*Old Style*'.
1868. Laid the foundation stone of his new residence, Aldworth, near Haslemere.
'*Lucretius*'.
1869. '*The Holy Grail*'.

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1872. '*Gareth and Lynette*'.
1880. *Ballads and Other Poems*', including '*The Voyage of Maeldune*', '*Rizpah*' and '*The Defence of Lucknow*.'
1883. Accepted a peerage from Gladstone.
1885. Hallam Tennyson married Audrey Boyle.
1885. '*Tiresias, and Other Poems*' including '*Crossing the Bar*'.
1892. '*The Foresters*'.
October 6, Died.
October 12, Buried in Westminster Abbey.

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Suggested Readings

1. A.C. Bradley : *A Miscellany.*
2. A. Lyall : *Tennyson* (EML)
3. Andrew Lang : *Alfred Tennyson.*
4. Batho and Dobreé : *Victorians and After.*
5. Charles Tennyson : *Six Tennyson Essays.*
6. E.C. Steadman : *Victorian Poets.*
7. F. Harrison : *Tennyson, Ruskin, Mill and other Literary Estimates.*
8. G. Saintsbury : *A History of Nineteenth Century Literature.*
9. G.K. Chesterton : *The Victorian Age in Literature.*
10. H.J.C. Grierson : *Lyrical Poetry from Blake to Hardy.*
11. Harold Nicolson : *Tennyson.*
12. Hugh Walker : *The Literature of the Victorian Era.*
13. J. Drinkwater : *Victorian Poetry.*
14. M. Luce : *Handbook to Tennyson's Works.*
15. *The Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. XIII.*
16. J.B. Steane : *Tennyson.*
17. John Pettigrew : *Tennyson, The Early Poems.*
18. *Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson*—Edited by John Killham.
19. *In Memoriam* : Percival.
20. *Commentary on 'In Memoriam'* Bradley.
21. *The Princess* : Wallace.
22. *Select Poem of Tennyson* : George and Hadow.
23. *Select Poems of Tennyson* : Rowe and Webb.
24. *Poems of Tennyson* (1832-42) : J.H. Fowler.
25. Compton-Rickett : *History of English Literature.*
26. *Tennyson : Critical Heritage* (a collection of critical essays).

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27. Select Poems
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32. Much Ado About Nothing (Text with Annotations)
33. Henry IV, Part I (Text with Annotations)
34. Henry IV, Part I (A Critical Study)
35. Richard II (Text with Annotations)
36. Richard II (A critical study)
37. A Midsummer Night's Dream (Study Guide Notes) with objective type Questions-Answers
38. Twelfth Night
    (Study Guide Notes) (do)
39. As You Like It
    (Study Guide Notes) (do)
40. The Merchant of Venice
    (Study Guide Notes) (do)

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41. Select Poems

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42. Select Poems

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43. The Hairy Age
44. Desire Under the Elms
45. The Iceman Cometh

R.K. NARAYAN:

46. The Guide

TAGORE:

47. Gitanjali

RAJA RAO:

48. Kanthapura
49. The Serpent and the Rope

KAMALA MARKANDAYA

50. Nectar in a Sieve

MULK RAJ ANAND:

51. Coolie
52. Untouchable

SAROJINI NAIDU:

53. Select Poems

SRI AUROBINDO

54. Savitri, Book I and Other Poems
55. New Indian English Poets & Poetry
56. History and Principles of Literary Criticism
57. New Criticism and New Critics
58. Background to English Literature
    (A study of literary forms)

DYLAN THOMAS:

59. Select Poems
60. New Pattern English Grammar and Composition

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